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"WHAT DO YOU MEAN?" ASKED SIR HUBERT, ANGRILY.

A RIGHTED WRONG.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

STAVELEY PARK.

THE rain came down in torrents, whilst the wind, in fitful gusts, would moan and shriek like demons, as it carried out its work of destruction, amid the old trees of Staveley Park.

Only now and then was it, that an unlucky pedestrian came in sight, and the lights in the cottages and uncurtained windows looked the only thing cheerful on that dreary road, as Sir Hubert Leville rode from the little country railway-station to the Park itself.

He was accompanied by a groom, whose thoughts were anything but pleasant ones, as he tore along the muddy road after his master;

the hoofs of his horse splash, splash, until he and his rider became equally besmeared.

"On, on, brave Brutus!" and the Baronet dug his spurs deeper into his favourite's sides, as he urged him to greater speed.

At last their destination was reached, when, not waiting for the attendance of the lodge-keeper, the groom speedily dismounted, opening the gate for his master to pass through.

A stately elm had fallen in their path, struck down by the ruthless wind, but Brutus made it no obstacle to the speed at which he was going, clearing the same before the former was aware of the fact, and a few moments later, drawing up, his bright coat covered with mud, and his sides flecked with foam, at the entrance to the mansion.

Bestowing a graceful pat on the horse's neck, Sir Hubert leapt from the saddle, and, consigning Brutus to the care of the groom, with a hasty injunction that he was to be well cared for, entered the house.

"How is she?" he asked of the servant, who

quickly relieved him of his outer coat, when, without waiting for the reply, he hastily ascended the stairs.

How quiet all appeared in that long corridor! Not a sound was perceptible to his senses, saving the barking of a dog in the outer yard, as, with a dread that even his footsteps should disturb the stillness, he gently turned the handle of a room at the further end.

A woman attired in black, with white apron and high cap, approached as he entered.

"I am glad you have come, Sir Hubert," she said; "my lady has been asking for you," and she motioned for him to approach the fire, the former being asleep.

"A son or a daughter, nurse?" he asked, as, allowing the woman to administer something to prevent his catching cold, he anxiously awaited her answer.

But the cordial she was preparing seemed to occupy her sole attention, the question having to be repeated before Sir Hubert could obtain an answer, when at the moment she was about to

reply, a gentle voice was heard from the bed inquiring for himself.

"Yes, I am here, darling!" he answered, and regardless of the damp which still clung to his garments, unheeding the remonstrances of nurse, who was almost in a fit at the sight, Sir Hubert had clasped his wife in his strong arms.

"And baby," said the latter, calling her husband's attention to a tiny mite of humanity which nestled close to her side.

"Oh! baby is a beauty!" he smiled, and then, to his questioning look,—

"A little girl," she responded.

And it was evident, although owing to the subdued light the expression of disappointment on the father's countenance was not apparent to the other occupants of the chamber, that baby went down several degrees in the estimation of the Baronet.

"You must not talk too much, my lady."

And nurse, upon whom it had suddenly dawned that there was an incomprehensible change in the tone of her master, naturally put it down to the cause of disappointment, and fearing her lady should notice the same, thus used her authority to prevent further mischief.

"Entailed in the male line," Sir Hubert muttered to himself, when later on he repaired to his own room, "and I came here to-night full of hope; yes, hope which has fallen, like that stately elm, a barrier in my path."

But the foreboding of a greater trouble than that hung over the master of Staveley Park.

The next morning Lady Leslie's condition was the cause of anxiety to her medical attendant, an anxiety, which, notwithstanding every precaution, hourly increased, symptoms having set in which baffled all his skill, obliging him on the third day to apprise Sir Hubert of the seriousness of the case.

"Do you think there is any danger, doctor?" the latter asked, his life apparently hanging on the answer.

"I should wish a consultation," was the evasive reply.

And so two eminent physicians from London were speedily in attendance, and the faintest hope conveyed to the husband although they knew but too well that Lady Leslie's life was not worth a day's purchase.

Another night had come and gone, her life slowly ebbing away, her time on earth shorter and shorter.

Sir Hubert was still beside her bed; they did not strive to prevent him now, the hours were so short in which she could remain with her hand in his.

It was useless to deceive him further, and the sad truth was told to him, when convulsive sobs shook his whole frame, and the physicians even feared that the blow would be greater than he could bear.

"You will never forget to love her! I know, Hubert, you were disappointed that there was no son to inherit the lands of Staveley; but, darling, it was Heaven's will, and you will not let my innocent babe suffer!"

A moan of anguish alone escaped from the lips of the strong man, as pressing the transparent hand of his dying wife, in answer to her prayer, his head sank buried in the snowy coverlet, whilst his breast heaved with the intensity of his grief.

"Heaven give me strength to stand this!" he cried. "Oh, Heaven, my punishment is greater than I can bear!" when, unable further to combat with his grief, he was led silently from the room.

And to Florence Lady Leslie came the darkness preceding the dawn of eternal life, as yet two days during which the spirit, reluctant to quit its mortal frame, lingered in unconsciousness; and then, like the flicker of a candle in its socket, it gave one burst forth into renewed life, when confiding her infant to her husband's care, one blessing on him with her last breath, and the beautiful eyes closed for ever.

CHAPTER II.

ROSE COTTAGE.

It was a small villa in a suburban district; a garden divided it from the main road in the front,

whilst a larger one, visible from the same point, ran at the back.

In summer it was the admiration of passers-by, owing to the roses which bloomed in profusion in every available spot, gaining for it the cognomen of Rose Cottage.

But the roses had long strewn the green grass with their falling leaves, and many a week had passed since their perfume, even beautiful in death, had filled the air, whilst the red tinge of the late autumn rested alone on the few leaves still hanging on the almost leafless trees.

The evenings had become cold, whilst all nature began to assume the dreary garb of a dying year, though at times the sun would burst forth in almost summer gladness.

"I cannot learn any more now, mother dear," and a boy of eight years or so shut the book over which he had been poring, whilst his mother, apparently intent on some fancy work, plied her needle in the waning light.

"Very well, darling; but if you do not study, Bruce, you can never be a great man," and the former passed her hand caressingly over the curly locks of the child. "Try a little longer; it will soon be dark, and then we will put by lessons for to-day."

With a weary sigh the boy resumed his task, whilst Mrs. Morven, putting aside her embroidery, took up the daily paper, hoping to divert her attention from her little son.

For some seconds all was silence; Bruce, with his head resting on his hands, intent on the page before him, till a slight exclamation from his mother caused him to look up.

"Too dark to read now, pet!" she said, and the boy, only too glad, put away his book, whilst, still retaining the paper, Mrs. Morven vacated the seat she had occupied by the window, as a servant entered to light the gas, when, Bruce begging that he might go and have a game, they left the room together.

"Is fate's hand in this?" she asked herself, as, resuming her paper, she again read:—

"On the 4th inst., at Staveley Park, the wife of Sir Hubert Leslie, of a daughter," and then further on, at a later date, was chronicled the death of the youthful mother.

"Yes, Hubert," she mentally ejaculated, and her dark eyes fell on the deep folds of her crape dress, "you have robbed the orphan and the widow, and your sin will yet find you out."

Lady Florence dead, and no son to inherit; but Bruce, running in to show her some white mice one of the servants had given him, put an end to her reflections.

Juanita Morven was a Spaniard by birth, on her mother's side; her father, an English officer, having married, when abroad, the beautiful senorita, whom he brought home, then but a bride of a few months.

The former had been dead some years, and when in the future Juanita, who was then but a girl, scarcely seventeen, one day left the educational establishment—in which, at her mother's death, she had been placed by the latter—in company with a gentleman, no one knew where—her father shouldered all the blame on the preceptress, whilst that lady, asserting her entire ignorance, added to her innocence in the affair retaliated by throwing it back on him, saying that had he acted a parent's part he would have made a home for her under his own roof long ago, and he, inwardly feeling there was some truth in the accusation, declared he would never rest until he had found his erring child.

And he did not: following every clue, some of which were fallacious, until he at last stumbled on the right one, discovering the youthful Juanita, and her husband at a Paris hotel.

Colonel Nelson's wrath, however, was of short duration, the latter proving to him that he was in every way worthy of his daughter, to whom he was devotedly attached, ending by giving an invitation to the former to accompany them on the tour they had contemplated: when, on their return, he trusted they should often see him at Staveley Park, the same to be considered his home whenever he liked to make it such.

But the ruler of events decided that it should

be otherwise. They had, been many months abroad, spending the happy hours beneath an Italian sun, enjoying the beautiful scenery of Switzerland's hills and vales, and, to the delight of the Colonel, visiting the scenes where years ago he had met and loved the beautiful senorita till the day when, as an avalanche, the blow which scattered all their hopes fell on them, the new son, the husband but of a few months, brought home dying, on that day when they had arranged together for return to England.

Yes, he had met with an accident, which proved fatal within the space of a brief half-hour.

He had but time to press the weeping girl, so soon to be a widow, to his heart, and all was over—Sir Bruce Leslie was dead.

Then came the sad return home, to find there was none for the girl, who in less than a year had become bride, widow, and was shortly to become a mother, but under her father's roof.

According to Sir Bruce's last request the physician in attendance had telegraphed to his brother as soon as the breath was out of his patient, so that on Juanita's return a week later, she found the latter installed in the place she had thought to be hers, who met her with cold politeness, informing her how matters stood, that he was heir-at-law, and a will having been left by the late Baronet, consequently no provision was made for her; in fact, it was the first intimation he had received that his brother had been married, but he offered her, in the event of her statement being true, the hospitality of his home until some arrangement could be arrived at.

But Juanita rejected his offer with scorn, her flashing fire as her Spanish blood rose at the doubt insinuated that she had a right to bear the name of Leslie; and then with her young heart bowed down with her great sorrow, she returned to her father, pouring into his ears the tale of her grief and imploring him to at once set out for France, bringing back with him the proofs of her marriage.

How anxiously she awaited his return. Her child at least would be heir, though she could lay no claim to the estate, and she could confront the man, with the proof that he was his brother's wife in her hand, who had dared to doubt the truth of what she said.

But her heart sank within her, as, on the Colonel's return, she read her worst fears reflected in his countenance.

The little church at Marseille had been destroyed by fire only two days after they left Paris, and no trace of the register left. Of course the people at the hotel where they stayed remembered the circumstances well, but they knew no one who was present at the ceremony, no one having heard of any other name but Morven, which was the one the young people went by.

"And you are sure, Nita, that you were married in the name of Leslie?" asked her father.

"Oh, yes, father," replied the girl, through her tears; "and do you doubt me, too?"

"No, my child; Heaven forbid," was the reply, "but—"

"Yes, I know what you would say," she answered, between her sobs, "My case is hopeless, and, indeed, it is but too true, though a time will come, father, I feel and know, when my name will be cleared, and my child will be the acknowledged heir of Staveley Park."

A few days later on her babe, little Bruce, was born, and in the possession of her infant treasure she partially forgot the trial of her young life, her faith fixed firmly on the belief that Providence would yet intervene to enable her to refute the calumnies of her enemies, and prove her to have been the lawful wife of the dead man.

His brother, Sir Hubert, had on several occasions offered to become her friend, even so far as to make her a yearly allowance, in consideration of the wrong he fully believed Bruce had done her, but she scornfully refused all offers of help.

Never until she came before him as a true woman, able to prove her rights, and clear her own and her boy's name, would she darken the doors of Staveley Park; and so, with but one purpose in life, one hope which as a beacon

urging her on onwards, to the peace which awaited her after all her trials she remained beneath her father's roof.

CHAPTER III.

THE COLONEL.

EIGHT years had fled since Colonel Nelson had brought his daughter to his suburban home, and he had ceased to look upon it as at all likely that Nita would ever be able to establish her claim.

In fact, he would rather matters should remain as they were than have any litigation in a court of law. He was very happy in his peaceful life, with his flowers, and—the greatest charm of his existence—his little grandson, to whom he was sufficiently rich to give a college education, and when the day came that he should be called to his rest there would be ample means left for his and his mother's benefit.

So the eight years sped their course, and the Colonel, instead of growing older, appeared to become younger in this blissful calm.

He had in his youth seen much service, losing an arm whilst fighting for his country, but that affected him little; amputation he strongly believed in, and carried out to the letter.

"If a member offend thee cut it off," his favourite quotation, parting with a little too and half his teeth with the same stoicism as he displayed when, on the field of battle, he calmly asked the doctor to chop off his shattered arm, until, as his daughter laughingly remarked, there would be nothing left of him.

"Halloa! Nita; all alone!" he asked, as on entering the room he discovered Mrs. Morven with the open paper still before her.

But she was no longer reading it; her face was turned towards the fire, whilst her eyes were a dreamy, far-away look, only leaving them when, with a half start, she turned at her father's approach.

"Yes," she replied. "Bruce is gone to play; but look here. You read that, father," and she held the journal to him, pointing out the announcement which had attracted her attention.

"Lady Leslie dead!" ejaculated the latter. "Dead—a bride of a year! How sad!"

"Yes," said Nita; "but look here," and she pointed also to the other event, in which she was interested—the birth of a daughter.

Colonel Nelson remained for some moments silent, whilst it was evident the thoughts of both ran in the same channel, when his daughter was the first to break the stillness, as advancing to where the former had seated himself by the table, she knelt by his side.

"Heaven's hand is in this," she said, looking up with a sudden fire in her dusky eyes. "The ways of Providence are inscrutable, but they are sure. Our boy will yet, with Heaven's aid, prove his right to Staveley Park."

"My poor child!" and the Colonel passed his hand over her glossy hair, "why will you let your mind work on an impossibility! Have I not done all that a man could do to establish your claim to the name of Leslie, and miserably failed! How could you do more!"

"No, no, father, I don't upbraid you, you know I don't," and she drew his face downwards until it rested against her own soft cheek; "but there is something within me, which is ever telling me that the day will come when my child will know no cause which should bring dishonour on his name. You know, father," she continued, "that I told you the verger and his wife were witnesses to the marriage."

"Yes, that is all right, Nita," the Colonel replied; "but even they had left Marcelle, leaving no clue to their whereabouts behind them."

"But they are living!" she said.

"They may be," was the reply.

"They are," she answered, excitedly; "I feel they are. Heaven would never be so cruel as to remove everyone, everything from my path that could prove the truth of my words; and though it be the work of years I will never rest until I make Sir Hubert Leslie own me as his brother's wife."

And then, with passionate sobs, she let her head droop on the old man's knee, when little Bruce rushed into the room.

"Look, grandpapa, look! I ain't he pretty?" he said, drawing his grandfather's attention to a little pug pup he held in his arms; but his eyes falling on the dejected attitude of his mother, as her sobs fell on his ears, he confided the dog to the care of the former, whilst throwing his arms round the other's neck, he used every childish entreaty for her to leave off crying.

Pressing the boy to her breast, Nita restrained her emotion, when, rising from her lowly position, she resumed her seat, to lavish praises on his new treasure.

And later on, long into the silent hours of the night, did Juanita watch, whilst little Bruce, with the tiny pug pressed close in his arms, slept in his snow-white bed, unconscious of the mother who bent over him, as tears of agony fell on his sunny curls, whilst she prayed for help from above, to assist her in her search.

Plan after plan revolved themselves in her mind respecting her course of proceeding.

She would go to France herself—to the little town where she and Bruce were married.

No one would recognise in her the young girl, who, nine years back, was wedded in the little Protestant church to the English monsieur.

So the next morning she almost took the Colonel's breath away when she told him she was going to leave for Calais the following day.

"You will take care of Bruce, father?" she said. "And you, darling," she continued, as she clasped the boy to her bosom, "you will be good whilst mamma is away! and I will bring you something pretty from France!"

"Bring me a pretty collar for Toby," said the child, and he held up the puppy to say good-bye to his mother; when a few hours later, with a spirit sanguine of success, Mrs. Morven started for the Continent, her father standing by the while, waving his one arm to her as she went on what he styled a mad journey.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOST PAGE.

THE next morning Juanita landed in Calais. She had crossed by the night boat from Dover, and when she set her foot on French ground the sun came out in all its brilliancy like an omen of good.

It helped, at all events, to raise her mind from the sense of despondency which had overwhelmed her, when the excitement under which she had been labouring having passed she found herself alone in a foreign land.

She carried but little luggage, and was not long delayed at the Customs, when she at once took train to Paris, her destination being the hotel where she and Bruce stayed during those few blissful days of her young life.

But the same had changed hands, and in no one could Nita recognise a familiar face.

Yes, nine years wrought many changes, and yet she was so little changed; care had failed to leave its traces on her lovely face, as though the hand of her sad destiny shrunk from marring the beauty which was alone left to her.

Impatient of delay, anxious to return, she remained but one night in Paris before proceeding on her journey.

The warm glow of autumn rested on the trees, whilst a bright sun caused the white houses of the little suburb to dazzle her eyes when Nita entered it at noon the next day.

The Protestant church, which she remembered so well, had been rebuilt with iron; and although she stayed some time by the gate in the hope of seeing someone connected with the same she could see no one.

There was the little cottage where formerly dwelt the woman whose duty it was to clean the sacred edifice. There seemed little alteration there. The ivy still covered the porch, and extended to the windows each side, opening on to the tiny garden, in summer time gay with flowers of every hue.

Surely, thought Nita, she could give her some

information leading to the object she had in view!

But in reply to her gentle knock it was a stranger who opened the door, who, in reply to her questions, stated that she had not long been appointed to the office of church cleaner; but madame had become too old for the work, and had gone to live with her son, somewhere in Paris.

"And you remember nothing of the fire which destroyed the old building?" asked Nita.

"Oh! yes, mademoiselle," the woman replied. "But come in, and I will tell you all about it. It is cold standing here."

Nita, only too glad of the invitation, quickly entered, whilst the beating of her heart must have been audible to her companion, who bringing forward some cakes and wine insisted on her taking some refreshment first.

"About the fire," she said, "she remembered it as though it were yesterday. There had been a wedding there a few days before, and Madame Cloville, the pew-opener, had just stepped over to her mother's to tell her all about it, it being what she thought a runaway match. And it isn't so lively here but what we are glad of a little sensation or romance; and I, being a girl at the time, listened attentively to the story."

"Do you remember the names of the parties?" asked Nita.

"Bless you! no, mademoiselle," answered the woman, in provincial French. "All I know is, madame said they were English, and the bride was very young and beautiful. Well, mother and I were intent on the story, when all at once the heavens were lighted up with a lurid glare. The church, which we could plainly see, was on fire. It was all safe, madame said, when she left after the evening service, which was over at six o'clock; and, frightened out of her life, she ran as fast as she could for assistance. But it was useless, for before water could be procured from the canal it was one sheet of flame. You see, mademoiselle, it was built of wood, the old church was, and it stood no chance. The over-heating of a flue, for it was cold weather, was the cause, they said, of the accident."

"And was nothing saved?" asked Nita.

"Yes, miss; fortunately the communion plate and the register books were not in at the time, it being the custom to remove them after the last service to the Manse."

"Then the books were not burnt!" Nita cried, before the woman could complete her sentence. "Tell me—tell me, good woman, where I can see the register, and I will double this as your reward."

She had risen from her seat in her excitement, when from her purse she drew two napoleons and placed them in the hand of her companion, whilst the latter looked on amazed but recovering herself,—

"Monsieur le Curé lives but a few steps from here. I will show mademoiselle the way," when hastily adjusting her cloak she put the hood over her head, telling Nita she was ready.

Too excited for words the latter followed her in silence, until they arrived at the gates of the Manse.

A neat maid answered their summons, who, on the woman explaining to her the purport of their visit, requested Nita to enter, and then closed the door on madame, who said she would await mademoiselle's return.

The room into which she was ushered was evidently the Curé's study; the walls were covered with well-filled bookcases, and the centre table was the same as used in offices.

The top was covered with papers of different descriptions, whilst an unfinished sermon lay open where it had been left by the writer; but the door opening, Nita had no time to make further observation, when the Curé himself entered the room.

He was a young man, not more than thirty; his face was close shaven, which made him look even younger; and a look of disappointment passed over the countenance of the former when she saw he was not the clergyman who had read the marriage service when she and Bruce had knelt before the altar rails.

But quickly conquering the feeling of depres-

slon which had suddenly seized her she told her errand, stating, with the tears starting to her eyes which she could not control, that not only did her honour but the future of her son depend upon her finding this proof of her marriage.

As she proceeded, mentioning the name of her dead husband, a change became perceptible on the face of the Curé, and he listened intently to the completion of her story; when, informing her that since the new building, which was of iron, had been erected, the books were kept there, whither he would conduct her immediately.

Madame was awaiting her when she emerged from the Manse, accompanied by the Curé himself, who, telling her that the lady would call at her cottage on her return from the church, quickly rejoined his visitor.

It was but a few minutes' walk when their feet trod the soft green grass leading to the sacred porch; when the Curé, inserting the key, opened the door, and, bidding Nita follow, advanced to the vestry.

How hollow their footsteps sounded on the tessellated floor, on which a glow of rich colour was thrown as the rays of the afternoon sun penetrated the painted windows.

For a few seconds Nita knelt before the altar, on which glittered a golden cross, whilst a canvas screen, on which different saints were portrayed, formed a dark background to the same, when, with bowed head, she implored Heaven to aid her in her search, and crown it with success. Then, with a happier feeling, she rejoined the Curé, who awaited her in the vestry.

The books had been taken down by him, the one bearing the date she required already placed for her investigation.

With eager eyes she watched the former as he turned to the page relating to the date and circumstances she gave him; but the certificate on which the balance of her life seemed to hang, the few words, more precious in her sight than untold gold, the leaf which would have removed the stain which now rested on the name of her boy, was gone.

With a low moan of inward pain, too great for words, she turned to the Curé, himself scarcely less moved, and closed the book.

It was useless to search further, and as every hope died within her she could scarce persuade her limbs to fulfil their office, when leaving the spot where those hopes now lay buried.

"You know nothing!" was all she asked, referring to the perished page.

"At present I cannot speak," was his reply; "my surmises may be incorrect, but"—and he fervently pressed her hand—"as I am the servant of Him who is the father of the fatherless and the widow, I will pursue inquiries, and should a clue to this mystery reach you there is my card. I am your friend."

He had uncovered his head while standing beneath Heaven; he registered a vow to serve her if it were in his power, and then, with the words *Dieu vous bénit*, he left her in charge of the woman, to whose cottage she now adjourned.

"It is too late for mademoiselle to return to Paris to-night," the latter said; "she is welcome to remain here."

"No, no!" replied Juanita, rousing herself from her sad thoughts. "You are very, very kind, but there is a diligence leaves at five o'clock—I will go by it. But will you give that to Monsieur le Curé?" she asked, as taking a leaf from her pocket-book she wrote a few lines, and put them into the woman's hands.

It was merely her address in London, with a few words of thanks for his kindness, and a request, should anything transpire respecting the abstracted certificate, would he communicate with her as the friend he had promised to be.

Once again in Paris she was as anxious to leave it for England; but not until the next day could she start on the home journey, when, notwithstanding that she took the shortest route, it seemed an interminable time, till worn out with excitement and fatigue she alighted at Rose Cottage.

CHAPTER V.

TROUBLES INCREASE.

BRUCE was delighted to see his mother back again, whilst he lost no time in enrolling Toby's fat neck in the new Parisian collar; but the Colonel, who was not well, was in anything but a good humour, declaring that he knew all along how it would end.

"But, papa, dear!" urged Nita, "it was impossible that you could tell that the certificate was abstracted when your idea was that the book had been destroyed in the fire."

"Well, burnt or stolen," the former replied, testily, "it amounts to the same thing. Your journey was a fruitless one."

"Perhaps not, dear."

"Perhaps not! Why, what have you got into your head now? A clue, I suppose, to the parties who did it," but as, in turning, his eyes fell on the sad, worn face of his daughter his tone became gentler. "Nita, my poor child!" he said, "may Heaven help you," and then bidding her sit beside him, she entered into the full particulars of her journey; not until at the conclusion of her story, when she averred her intention of proceeding to Staveley Park on the following day, did he lose his patience.

"Are you mad!" he asked. "What is your reason for doing that?"

"This, father," was the reply. "To whose interest could it be to remove all proofs of his brother's marriage but Sir Hubert's! And maybe now, when the hand of affliction is heavy upon him, when Heaven in its justice has denied him an heir, he may repent when he is aware that I am not ignorant of his perfidy."

"Hush, Nita!" returned the Colonel, "you allow your feelings to carry you too far. You jump at conclusions, and accuse Sir Hubert of a crime of which he may never be guilty."

But, notwithstanding her father's arguments, Juanita could not rest until, in the impulsiveness of her nature, she had confronted the former, when she would appeal to his better feelings to restore if not the lands to which her son was heir at least to give her back the name which was rightfully her own.

"You are a mad girl, Nita!" were the Colonel's last words, as she started the next day; "but don't be long away, dear, I feel far from well, and don't like to be left."

"Bruce will take care of you, papa, dear—won't you?" she said, turning to the boy; "and mamma will be back to-morrow."

Scarcely four weeks had elapsed since that night when Sir Hubert rode through the pouring rain to his wife's bedside, and now he was alone, with his empty heart, and his frustrated hopes.

He never cared to look on the face of the babe, the innocent cause of all his suffering, and yet whilst the last dying words of his lost love rang in his ears he felt it was she who must yet fill the void in his affections.

All around Staveley appeared to sympathise with him in his great grief, and the leafless trees would sigh and moan as though they partook of his sorrow, whilst within even the servants moved with noiseless tread, fearful of disturbing the silence which hung over all.

In the same place, where he had sat day after day since his wife's death, he now occupied the chair before the library fire, his head, in which grey hairs had suddenly appeared, resting on his hand, as still he nursed his bitter sorrow, when a servant, entering, announced Mrs. Morven.

The name, so suddenly falling on his ear, aroused him from his reverie, as rising from his chair his eyes encountered those of Juanita, whilst for a moment he seemed incapable of speech, until the door closing behind the former recalled him to a sense of his position, when, motioning her to a chair, he requested to know the purport of her visit.

"I have just returned from Marcellé, Sir Hubert. Doubtless you can guess the object I had in view when I went there," Nita, replied, as seating herself, she gazed on the grief-stricken man before her.

But the sound of her voice had thrown his

thoughts in a different channel, whilst his face resumed its hard, proud expression, the soft look which sorrow had given to his countenance having fled at her words.

"I can only surmise, madame," he answered, "that you went there to endeavour to corroborate by proofs which never existed the romantic story with which you favoured me some years since."

"I went, Sir Hubert, to search myself for that which should redeem my lost name."

"Indeed," he replied, sarcastically. "Of course you found it!"

"No," she returned; "but not because it never existed, Sir Hubert, but because I was not first in seeking the same."

"What do you mean?" he asked, angrily.

"This," she replied, whilst her eyes flashed fire. "I mean that those whose interest it was to destroy what I held most sacred, to deprive me of what a woman prizes more than life, and to rob my boy of his birthright, had been before me."

In her excitement she had risen from her seat, and for a moment Sir Hubert's countenance became pale with suppressed rage, the next with calm sarcasm, he inquired,—

"Whom, may I ask, do you accuse, Mrs. Morven? Pray be seated, and let us quietly discuss this matter."

"No," she answered; "I will say here what I have to say for the last time; but until I have—which mark me, Sir Hubert Leslie, I shall one day have—undeniable testimony to the truth of what I state I name no one. I came to night to appeal to your heart, if you have one, to do me justice before a higher power compels you to do so. Heaven is against you in not blessing you with a son, in taking from you the only creature whom I believed you loved!"

"Hush!" he said; "at least spare her, and listen to me," he added, in a softer tone. "I do not doubt your word; you were but a child at the time my brother was supposed to have married you, and, as many girls are, may have been deceived; but it is utterly absurd to suppose for one moment that you can uphold your claim to the Staveley estates on your bare word, that you can bring forward your boy as heir to the same on your unsupported evidence. Hark to what I say. When you can establish his legal right to them I will renounce my hold on such."

Seeing the effect his words had on her, he continued,—

"You come to me, Mrs. Morven, indirectly accusing me of robbery and usurpation of rights which do not belong to me. It is not only foolish but it is wrong—unquestionably wrong. I will be your friend if you will not persist in making me your enemy, and I will, as far as I can, advance the interests of your son."

Overtaxed with the excitement of the last few days Juanita's spirits gave way, as, sinking into the chair she had vacated, she burst into tears, whilst Sir Hubert, not blind to the advantage he had gained, kindly pressed her hand, while reiterating his feelings of friendship to herself and boy.

"I will do no more," she said, rising to go, "but leave it in the hands of Him who is the protector of the fatherless and the widow."

"Amen," Sir Hubert replied, whilst a look of relief passed over his stern features.

And so they parted, when once more, dispirited and oppressed with a sense of disappointment, Juanita returned home.

She was surprised to learn from the servant that the Colonel was confined to his room. She knew he must be very ill before he would consent to being kept in bed, and it was with a mingling of fresh trouble that she ascended the stairs.

Bruce was sitting by his grandfather's side, with a grave look on his childish face, but sprang up with a cry of delight when his mother entered the room.

"Oh, father dear, what is the matter!" asked Nita, and she threw her arms round the invalid's neck, but the short quick breath told her too plainly from what he was suffering.

"You must see Dr. Atkins, dear, at once," she said, and, ringing the bell, she gave directions

to the servant who answered it to go immediately for medical assistance, notwithstanding that the sick man declared there was no occasion for the attendance of the former—he would be all right in a few days.

He considered a doctor was always unnecessary except when a limb had to be amputated, and in the present case, there being no member with which he could dispense which would alleviate his suffering, he thought it utter nonsense to call one in.

But Juanita was immovable; so Dr. Atkins came as soon as possible after having received the summons.

"There's not much the matter, doctor," the Colonel said; "but perhaps it is as well you came to satisfy Mrs. Morven."

And the doctor thought it was as well he did, for the patient was seriously ill, and, as he told his daughter, bronchitis might prove very troublesome with a man of his build.

"I don't think I shall be here long, child," the former said, one day, when Nita was watching by his bedside, "and I want to speak to you about how you will find affairs when I am gone."

"Don't talk like that, father," she replied, "you will recover, but just now are weak and nervous."

A faint smile passed over the face of the sick man.

"No, no," he answered, "I know better. The hardest battle I have ever been called upon to fight is before me now—the battle with death. Don't say me nay, Nita. I feel it, and know that in the end the latter will conquer. But don't cry," he continued, as the tears started to the eyes of the other; "maybe for a time you'll miss me, and I had hoped to have been spared until—until, darling, you could rightfully assume your own name. But I shall be better off; take care of Bruce, there is plenty left for you and him."

Then a fit of coughing prevented him for a time from saying more, but as it passed off,—

"Nita," he said, "there is one secret in my life that I must tell you, because there is another to whom I have left a portion of the property which otherwise would have been yours and Bruce's alone."

"Some years before I met your mother, when abroad, I came across a little French girl. She was very pretty, and whilst I fancied I loved her she fell desperately in love with me, and ultimately I married her. I was very wild in those days, and, being only a subaltern, had not more money than I knew what to do with. My father had paid my debts over and over again, until he refused to do so any more, and I felt sure was he cognizant of my marriage he would disown me."

"The three months' leave, which I had spent in the French capital, was drawing to a close when these unpleasant facts forced themselves upon me. To take my little Marie to England would be madness, to leave her would I knew break her heart."

"There was no alternative. So putting off the evil moment in which I should be compelled to break it to her, I let her live on in a fool's paradise; while, although I had ceased to love her, the part I was acting made me despicable in my own eyes. But when, at last, I told her it was imperative that I should rejoin my regiment; that it was equally impossible that I could take her with me, I was totally unprepared for the scene which followed."

"Her passion overcame her strength, and after heaping curses on my head she fell senseless at my feet, when placing her on a sofa I summoned assistance, and, after pressing a kiss on her white face, left the house."

"The next day I left for England, when she calmly bade me a sorrowful adieu, reluctantly accepting the money I gave her, with an address where she could write to me, added to the promise that I would not forget her."

"But, alas! in six months Marie was as much out of my thoughts as though we had never met, until I even ceased to apply for her letters; till one day, being in that direction, more out of curiosity than anything else, I inquired if there were any."

"Yes, there was one, but not in Marie's neat hand, and the envelope was edged with black. It was from the woman who had been with her in her last moments."

"Poor Marie had died, loving me to the last, and with her latest breath beseeching me not to forsake our boy."

The Colonel was silent for a few moments, whilst the recollection of the past caused the tears to well to his eyes.

"Is he alive now, father?" asked Nita.

"Yes," was the reply; "and it is to him that I have willed a portion of my property. It is but a small atonement for the misery I caused his mother. You would not have it otherwise would you, my child?"

"Oh! no, no!" she answered. "But you have not told me where he is."

"I do not know; after Marie's death he was entrusted to the care of Madame Cloville, and when he grew to manhood, at his own request, he made the Church his profession. But it is many years now since I have heard of him."

"But, father, can't you give me any clue?" asked Mrs. Morven. "Madame Cloville, you say; that was the name of the verger's wife. Oh! can it be the same?"

"I can say no more, Nita. The address I used to send to is in with my other papers, the rest I must leave to you. But the name under which he was reared was that of 'Leslie.'"

"Leslie, father?"

"Yes, Nita; but no connection with that of your husband—an assumed one I took when I so bitterly wronged my poor Marie. Heaven forgive me; but leave me now, child, I feel as if I could sleep."

The day following the sufferer was no better, and as time went on Dr. Atkins feared there was but little hope of his recovery, a fear which the Colonel himself fully realised, the aims of his youth rising before him in greater magnitude as he neared the eternal shores which loomed in the distance, till the great pain from which he was suffering on the previous days suddenly left him; and with his one arm encircled round the form of his little grandson, the hand clasped in that of his daughter, the curtain slowly descended on his life's drama, and his cold limb fell motionless on the white coverlet.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR HUBERT'S VISIT.

IN the unravelling of the mystery (which was the theme on which her mind ever reared) had been the main object of Nita's existence during her father's lifetime, it was doubly now that not only had she to clear the honour of her own name, but to seek for the brother revealed to her in his dying moments.

She was powerless to act whilst she could gaze on the dead face, and the hot tears she could not control would fall on the senseless clay. But when they bore him from the home, and he had passed from her sight, like the roses he loved so fondly, she began the work he had left for her to do; searching through his private papers for anything which might assist her in her task.

But there was nothing save the address of the girl who had fallen a victim to his cruelty, heading the letters she had written him in her anguish and despair, in which every line spoke of the undying love that, notwithstanding his perfidy, she still maintained for him.

And as Nita continued to wade through much that was useless and consigned by her to the waste-basket she came across letters of a later date, those of her own mother, and her portrait painted on ivory.

Then, tied with red tape, were a number of receipts of no consequence now, and she was about to throw them on one side when the paper on which some were written attracted her attention.

They contained acknowledgements of money paid to an English college in the Rue St. Honoré, for the education, &c., of Henri Leslie.

Feeling convinced that the lad mentioned must be the brother of whom she was in quest, Mrs. Morven carefully selected those papers from

the rest, determining at once to write to the address given, assuring herself before completing her search that there was nothing more of importance.

Colonel Nelson had died a rich man, having during the latter part of his life entered on speculations which had turned out successful; and the amount left to his children—the larger share of which went to Juanita and her boy—greatly outvied their expectations.

A week had now passed since the cold earth had fallen over the grave of the dead soldier, when she with Bruce were startled by a loud knock and ring at the door of Rose Cottage.

It was so seldom that visitors called that the sound caused her to look up from her reverie in which she was indulging, whilst the boy dropped the brush with which he was painting some Christmas cards, when Sir Hubert Leslie was announced.

"I am afraid," said the latter, in recognition of the cold bow with which Nita received him, "that my presence will not give you any pleasure. The last time we parted, Mrs. Morven, it was in anger. I have come to offer you once more the friendship I really feel for you. Will you accept it?"

He held out his hand, gently refusing the chair she had offered him until he had received her answer.

"Sir Hubert," she said, "you remember that the errand on which I came to you but three weeks back. I told you then how my journey to France had ended, and the abstraction of the leaf, on which my honour rested, from the church register. In my thoughts I coupled your name in connection with that abstraction; and until you can, before Heaven, swear that you know nothing of it, I cannot take your hand."

"I am as ignorant of the abstraction of the document, if such ever existed—"

Before he could complete his sentence the hot Southern blood of his listener deluged her face and neck with crimson, while the large dusky eyes, but a moment before and soft in their misery, now flashed with the fire of indignation.

"If," she repeated; "do you still doubt the veracity of my statement?"

"I never doubted but that you were led to believe yourself the lawful wife of my dead brother, but that you are labouring under a wrong impression is equally as clear to my mind."

"Then, Sir Hubert," and she drew herself up proudly, "I must decline your friendship. I hold the lands of Stavelay of little value where the name of myself and the honour of my boy here is at stake, and to clear the latter there is not a stone I will leave unturned; and He who makes all things plain in His own good time I faithfully believe will crown my efforts with success."

"I fear you will weary of your undertaking, not that I wish for one moment to deter you from your attempt; but, for your own sake, I should advise otherwise. You are young, handsome, and may yet meet a man more worthy of your affection than he who is gone."

"Hush, Sir Hubert! speak not to me of love or marriage; a second one I should never enter into. Do you think I would go to any man with a blot upon my name? And, as for love, all I shall ever know lies buried in the grave of his father," and she pointed to where Bruce sat, puzzling over the scene before him. "Leave me," she continued, almost imperiously, "and until I can prove him the heir of Sir Bruce Leslie it is better for both that we do not meet. If I have wronged you I am truly sorry, but should my suspicions prove correct may Heaven forgive you; I never could."

She had grown calmer, though still the recollection of her wrongs caused her beam to heave with the excitement of her feelings, and she would have moved towards the bell when Sir Hubert arrested her progress.

"Mrs. Morven," he said, with suppressed anger, "I came to you holding the olive branch of peace; you have sent me away laden with reproaches. You accuse me of a crime of which I

am innocent; all my advances to friendship you reject with scorn. For the brother's sake, notwithstanding my faured conviction to the contrary, I would have looked on you as the sister you claim to be, taking into consideration your youth and innocence, added to your false trust, your betrayed faith; but you refuse my efforts to make reparation for a brother's fault. I have done. Should you prove successful in asserting your right to the name of Leslie I will be the first to acknowledge that right; till then, according to your wish, so let it be, we will part."

He moved towards the door, but turning once more held out his hand, while Juanita, with her gaze fixed on the ground, her arm encircling the boy who had instinctively crept to her side, took it in her own.

"Good-bye," she said, "and till then I am Mrs. Morven."

Then, as in a dream, she stood still where he had left her; she heard the servant open the outer door in answer to the bell she had rung, and close the same after him—Sir Hubert was gone.

Could it be possible that this man was the villain she deemed him?—this man with a stern, proud face, which could become soft and impressionable as a woman's under the pressure of a bitter wrong, and the inclination to recall her words? To believe in him, to renounce the fulfilment of the task she had set herself was strong upon her, but turning to resume her seat those dark eyes, now soft as a gazelle's, falling on the face of her boy, rekindled in her the desire to retrieve his rights, while it gave her renewed strength to accomplish her end.

The voluminous correspondence of her late father had been by her carefully looked through. There was no more relevant to her case; therefore destroying such as was useless, and tying those together she purposed keeping, her first proceeding was to consult an eminent lawyer, of whom she had heard.

She had seldom left home since the Colonel's death, not caring to leave Bruce; but Mrs. Atkinson, the old, faithful housekeeper of the former, having been re-established in her prior capacity at Rose Cottage, Nita felt satisfied in placing the boy in her charge; and a day or two after Sir Hubert's visit she was on the point of leaving for town when a letter bearing the Marcellie postmark was placed in her hand.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. RIDGWAY.

Yes, it was from Marcellie, the tiny town so near to the beautiful city—from Marcellie, where nine long years ago, she had sworn to love, honour, and obey the husband of a few brief months, and then her dream of happiness was over.

The young girl who in her trusting faith had leant on the arm of him as they entered the quaint little church, who before Heaven's altar had vowed to cherish her, was now a woman with a woman's cares, and he lying peacefully in his early grave.

Even the church itself was gone, all in connection with her young life's romance melting away as the phantasies of a pleasant dream, her bitter sorrow alone remaining the stern reality.

She turned the letter again and again in her nervous fingers, anxious though fearful to break the seal, while before her mental vision arose the pretty Manse with its ivy-covered porch, and the kind, sad face of the young curate, when feeling he would not write unless some light had fallen over the mystery surrounding the abstracted leaf, she tore it open.

"MA CHERE MADAME,"—It commenced—"Immediately on your leaving Marcellie I considered over the strange circumstance of the missing certificate. No one that I was aware of but the vergier and myself having access to the books, and on my questioning the former I was perfectly satisfied he was as ignorant as I was of the transaction. When my suggestion that

it might have occurred in the time of his predecessor meeting with the reply from him that it was very likely, I instituted inquiries.

"Monsieur Cloville was dead, but his wife I succeeded in finding. She has been living some time in Paris with her son, and if ever a mysterious woman presented herself before me it was madame, and I am doubtful whether she is answerable for her actions. It appears she associates me with someone in the past, and had much difficulty in controlling her emotion when she heard my name, but steadily refuses to give me any explanation until she has seen you, stating she was witness to your marriage, and to you only will she confess what she has to say. Can you meet her in Paris, or shall I frane her to London? Awaiting your reply, I am, your faithful friend,

"HENRI DE BEY."

With strange feelings, in which hope and fear mingled, Nita read and re-read this strange epistle, debating in her mind whether she should go to London or await the interview with Madame Cloville; but finally considering it would be as well to consult Mr. Ridgway, she at once started on her journey that she might return in time to write to the Curé.

On arriving at the office she was at once conducted into the presence of the former. He was a middle-aged man, with a stout frame, and was, from lameness, unable to rise when Mrs. Morven was announced; but Nita could see how his sharp eyes scanned her from head to foot, as, apologising for his affliction which obliged him to retain his chair, he begged her to be seated.

His rather long hair was streaked with grey, while all the happiness apparently for him in life lay in the creature comforts that surrounded him.

Mr. Ridgway received his clients in his private sitting-room, divided from the office by a long passage running the length of another apartment which served as his bedroom, and closed in at each end by a door, one of which opened on the lawyer in the former, and the other on the head clerk who, with a boy, occupied the latter.

The passage was kept religiously private, all callers being ushered in by another entrance, although it was whispered that Mr. Ridgway had on more than one occasion had eavesdroppers concealed in the same, who popped in at an unfortunate moment for the more unfortunate client; but though one or two shady transactions had been mentioned in connection with the lawyer, he was recommended from one to the other, with the assurance that if you only have the money, if anyone could pull you through a case it was Ridgway, owing to which the man of law prospered and clients became ruined, whilst the former sat in his luxurious rooms, the walls of which were hung with pictures of enormous value which had once adorned nobler homes.

Taking the chair opposite his own to which he motioned her, Nita waited a second whilst the lawyer shifted his lame leg into a more comfortable position, when asking the subject on which she desired to consult him, she replied that having frequently heard his name mentioned she had decided to place her case in his hands.

Mr. Ridgway bowed.

"I am in a position to pay you whatever your fees may be," Nita continued.

Mr. Ridgway smiled; it was a smile of satisfaction, and his prospective client proceeded,—

"It is useless to expect you to do anything for me, Mr. Ridgway, unless you are conversant with the whole story."

"Quite true, madam, quite true. A doctor can give no relief where a patient refuses to tell him of his symptoms," and once more Mr. Ridgway shifted the position of his leg, when Nita told him of her marriage when a mere girl, the missing certificate, and Sir Hubert's refusal to believe the truth of her statement that she ever was his brother's wife.

The lawyer looked grave, very grave, and taking up a pen commenced making sundry notes as she proceeded; never interrupting her until she came to the letter she had that day received from the Curé, with the intelligence it con-

tained relative to Madame Cloville, when a sudden glad light came into his sharp eyes.

"We must have that woman here," he said. "She holds the clue to the mystery surrounding the case, and until we have the proofs before us of the marriage it would be madness to attempt to oust Sir Hubert Leslie on the assertion of your bare word. No, leave that letter with me. I will immediately take steps to bring that woman to London. In the meanwhile, you can, if you like, write to Monsieur de Bey, telling him what you have done."

A short pause, during which the lame limb was again shifted, and Mr. Ridgway continued,—

"Of course, Mrs. Morven, you and I are at present perfect strangers. Under those circumstances, I cannot move a step in this matter until I am in receipt of fifty pounds," and a look of pleasurable surprise passed over his countenance when Nita placed in his hand five ten-pound notes. "Many thanks! I see you are a woman of business," he added, and, placing his hand on a spring bell near him, the office-boy soon appeared, by the door of the private passage. "Tell Mr. Tremell to come here, and bring with him a stamped receipt for fifty pounds."

It was but a short time when the head clerk made his appearance by the same entry, bringing to Nita's mind the idea of what kind of man Newman Noggs might have been, as, placing the paper he held in his bony fingers in the hand of his employer, he only awaited his order to leave the room, an order quickly given and as quickly obeyed, when the latter had satisfied himself that the paper was correct, after which handing the same to Juanita, with many apologies that he was unable to rise, bade her good-morning, with assurances that the matter would receive his immediate attention.

There was nothing more for her to do now than to await patiently the issue of events, Mr. Ridgway having told her he would write as soon as his plans were matured.

So, resting on the assurance of his good faith, she felt happier than she had done for months, on her return home writing a few lines to Monsieur de Bey, in which she thanked him for not forgetting her, of the heavy loss she had had in the death of her only parent, and the steps she had taken in the endeavour to elucidate the mystery of the abstracted register.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHANGE.

"I WISH, upon my soul I do, that she could establish her right not only to the name of Leslie, but to Staveley itself."

Thus thought Sir Hubert, as he returned from his interview with Nita to his now desolate home.

"It was too bad to treat a girl like that as Bruce did! And yet, when I looked on those dusky eyes, and saw the damask colour mount to her clear olive cheek, one couldn't blame him; such beauty will, at times, make a fellow forget even honour."

And all during that journey homeward the face of Mrs. Morven was ever present with the baronet.

She was with him when he entered the train, was with him in the carriage he had selected, because it contained no other passenger, and met him again on the country platform, where his servant awaited him, with horses outside to convey him to the Park.

The vision of the wronged girl never left his side, until in the saddle other recollections crowded themselves into his imagination, and his mind wandered back to when, a year ago, he had ridden along the same road, through the driving rain.

A keen, wintry air now swept o'er his forehead; and Brutus, impatient to be off, pawed on the hard frosty ground, when, his master giving him the rein, he bounded along the country road until, as on that other night, they reached the park gates.

"I will ask one or two fellows down here,

or else go to London myself," mused Sir Hubert, as he dashed over the smooth expanse of snow, which led to the house itself, Brutus, with his hoofs, throwing the foathery covering in every direction: "I can never stand the lonely solitude of this place much longer."

These were the meditations of the master of Staveley, which, in truth, rested quietly enough amid the large bare arms, save for the snow, of the surrounding oak trees.

Few lights were visible from the exterior, whilst within scarcely a sound was audible.

Throwing off his coat, on his arrival, into the hands of a servant, Sir Hubert repaired to the only room he had cared to occupy since his wife's death.

He had often revolved in his mind that it was almost necessary he should visit the rooms which had been here, but when the hour came in which he had determined to carry out his intention his heart failed him; the sight of things her hands had touched, the very articles she prized, would bring back so vividly to his recollection the image of the girl he so fondly loved and early lost, that he shrunk from the task, excepting for meals, making a practice of occupying this apartment only.

It was late when he arrived, Staveley being some distance from the metropolis; and a gentle knock, which he evidently expected, as he seated himself by the library fire, was soon heard on the room door, when, in answer to his "Come in," there entered a woman, carrying in her arms a little white-robed creature of some twelve months' old.

The latter gave a cry of delight as her eyes fell on the form of Sir Hubert, who, having answered in the affirmative to nurse's strict inquiries that he was not damp, held out his arms to receive her.

"My pet lamb!" he ejaculated, as he pressed her close to his bosom, where the tiny head nestled, whilst her fingers clung round his firm white hand. "Are you come for your evening kiss?"

In reply to which a rosebud mouth was raised until the coral lips met his, and nurse still stood by, whilst father and child were closed in a fond embrace; and then, midst tears and entreaties, little Florence Leslie was carried off to bed.

How long Sir Hubert remained after his baby daughter's exit he scarcely knew, her very presence again sending his thoughts back—back to the night when Brutus and he splashed through mire and rain, to find, through her advent, that he was so soon to lose the only woman he ever loved.

At first his feelings seemed to visit it on the innocent babe, and weak succeeded weak before he could be prevailed upon to look on the unconscious cause of his misery; but when the blue eyes—her eyes—looked into his, the tiny mouth smiled on him with her smile, his heart went out in all the intensity of his feelings towards his infant girl, and the love which was wanting was lavished on her in all its magnitude.

It took the household rather by surprise when, on the following morning, Sir Hubert gave orders that fires were to be lit in the different apartments, all of which were to be thoroughly aired and cleaned, so as to be ready for occupation.

"The world is coming to an end!" was the butler's exclamation; whilst the female servants felt convinced Sir Hubert was going to be married again, which, when it reached the ears of nurse, caused that lady to go into such tantrums as the others declared they had never seen.

In the stables the consternation was even greater; the head groom becoming white as a sheet when the Baronet, who had never been known to enter the yard since her ladyship's death, presented himself before him a day or two later.

"I shall be joining the meet next week, Saddler," he said. "Is Nero all right?" and he patted the side of a splendid animal, his favourite hunter.

For the moment Saddler's breath was taken away, but when he recovered himself,—

"Yes, sir, he's all right," he said, "but mighty fresh."

"So much the better," was the reply. "Have

they been out yet?" referring to the horses in general.

"No, sir, not yet. We were just a-going to get their clothes on," said Saddler, who had by this time recovered his self-possession, and two other grooms put in an appearance, with the identical cloths over their arms.

When Sir Hubert, after taking a general survey, and bestowing a kind word and caress on his canine friends, returned to the house, the grooms, when his back was turned, entering into surmises as to the cause of this extraordinary change.

"I thought the snail would soon come out of his shell," said one.

"And I'm mighty glad of it," replied Saddler. "You fellows won't have it all your own way no longer," to which a hump and a general titter was the only response, when one of the gardeners coming to the stables for manure entered into the conversation.

"Well, I don't blame him for enjoyin' himself while he have the chance," said the latter, "for if all tales be true, he be no more Sir Hubert than I be Sir John!"

"Go on, man, what are you talking about!" said Saddler. "Do you mean to say his brother ain't dead?"

"No, I don't," answered John. "He be dead enough, he be, the more shame to Sir Hubert that he didn't have his body brought over here to be buried in the family vault, and not left to go to worms in furrin' parts," and old John lifted a fork full of manure, which he threw viciously into his wheelbarrow. "No, what I means is this—what about his son?"

"I never knew he had one," laughed Saddler.

"Ah! 'taint all knows what I know," said John, who, now that he had excited his hearer's curiosity, walked away with his barrow in the most aggravating way. "She didn't think I seed her," he said to himself, "but curiosity is my worst vice, an' when a young leddy comes as she did, I knows 'taint for nothin'."

But what his curiosity had led him to learn John did not reveal, only muttering to himself, as he emptied his wheelbarrow on the snowy ground.

So, as Sir Hubert decided not to go to London, he invited several friends to spend Christmas with him at Staveley, though it wanted close on a month to that time. The November fogs experienced in the former he could not endure, a feeling in prevalence with most, having the effect of causing his guests to gladly accept his invitation, and in due time the Park became quite a different place.

But Sir Hubert did not derive the beneficial effect he had hoped to experience from his again entering into society, and filling his house with song and laughter.

His friends declared the change in him delightful, for they really thought, they said, he was going to retire into the life of a hermit; but when the day's excitement was over, and alone he sat with his head resting on his hand, their opinion might have altered, for they were never witnesses of the time when, with his arms enfolding a wee form, with a tiny head nestled close, so close to his bosom, he inwardly wished that those two could pass from the whirl and turmoil of the world.

And then that sad face, with its large dusky eyes, would rise up reproachfully before him, whilst in imagination a childish voice cried out for justice—a child with the voice of Bruce, his dead brother.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CURÉ'S VISIT.

MR. RIDGWAY fulfilled his promise of not allowing Nita's case to be delayed. He lost no time in writing to Monsieur de Bey, telling him of the instructions he had received from Mrs. Morven, and requesting him to send Madame Cloville without loss of time, enclosing sufficient to defray all expenses.

To this the clergyman returned a telegram at once, intimating the hour of that lady's arrival at Charing-cross, he, himself, having volunteered

to accompany her, as she had never before been out of her own country, her travelling experiences even there being very limited.

Madame Cloville was a stout, strong woman of the build usually seen amongst Irish milk-carriers. She was dressed in black, with white apron and cap, according to the style of her countrywoman; no persuasion that could be used succeeding in inducing her to assume a bonnet, whilst it was with great difficulty she could be prevailed upon to enclose her feet in boots in lieu of the *sabots* she had been accustomed to wear.

Monsieur de Bey was as far off as ever from discovering the reason of her strange manner towards himself. While respecting the object of her journey she refused to enter into that or anything concerning it until, as she said, she placed the facts before the notary himself.

Mr. Tremell was there to meet them on their arrival, but it being too late to do more than arrange where they should stay, then an hour was named for the following day on which they should present themselves at the office of Mr. Ridgway; so the former, after advising them as to the best accommodation they could obtain at a moderate rate, once more returned to his employer.

Madame Cloville appeared bewildered with the notes and whirl at Charing-cross, and being fatigued with her journey, was not sorry to retire early.

Not so the Curé; circumstances had revolved themselves in his mind which had excited not only his sympathy but his curiosity in the fortunes of the young widow; and when his strange companion left him for the night, he determined to proceed to the residence of the former.

Josinta was seated in her pretty drawing-room engaged on some kind of needlework, whilst Bruce by her side was preparing his lessons for the following day, when Monsieur de Bey was announced.

"This is indeed, kind," she said, as having heard from him his reason for being in England, she cordially pressed his hand, after which, with a kindly recognition of the boy's presence, he entered on the subject predominant in the thoughts of each.

A great temptation arose in the breast of Josinta to ask him, when speaking of Madame Cloville, if he had ever heard her mention one Marie, whose child had been left in her care when she was herself a young woman; but the dread of betraying the secret of her dead father, when, although the name was the same, it might be an entirely different person, deterred her from doing so.

"You were never in England before, monsieur, I suppose?" she asked. "You must think London a wonderful place!"

"I will tell you more about it in a day or two," he replied. "True it is my first visit to 'perfidious Albion,' as the French call her," and he smiled; "but London must be magnificent to outdo Paris in beauty."

"But you are French, are you not?" a puzzled expression passing over her face. There was something to her familiar in the expression of his features as a smile like a passing sunbeam came over them—a something for which she could not account, but when she again looked it was gone.

"Not wholly so," he replied; "my father was English, but I never knew either parents, losing both when I was too young to remember."

"And no one ever told you about them? Have you no relatives?" she asked; then suddenly recollecting herself, "forgive me," she added, "for diving into your history! You must think me very rude."

"Rude; not at all," he answered, the same smile passing over his countenance. "I really know little of my childhood. I have a dim recollection of a white cottage, and a woman with dark eyes whom I called mother, and who at times caressed me, whilst at others she called me *un fils Anglais*, and told me I was only fit to be haaged, as my father should have been. Not a very pleasant existence, was it?"

Again that puzzling and familiar expression came over his features.

"And is that all the reminiscences you cherish of your youth?" she asked, again chiding herself, and apologising for her inquisitiveness.

"Oh, no," he answered; "I had many happy years after that, years spent in the college where I was educated. I often wondered why, like the other boys, I never went home, but I never did, knowing no other until I left it to enter the Church; but I really must leave you now, Mrs. Morven," he said, rising. "See how late the hour is, and you forget I am a stranger in this huge city."

"Wait, my servant shall see you into the right bus for London," she replied, advancing to ring the bell. "You perceive I am not so forgetful as you deem me."

"You are too kind," he answered. "You will be at Mr. Ridgway's to-morrow at the appointed hour to meet madams!" and he held out his hand to her, as he kissed Bruce on his fair forehead.

"Without fail, monsieur, I shall be there," she replied, grasping the former. "*Bon soir*," and giving directions to James to see him in the right direction for town, Mrs. Morven bade him adieu.

Little sleep visited the eyes of Juanita on that night, and when they did close in forgetfulness for a short space she dreamt that her father was by her side, imploring her to seek for the child, Marie's child; and when she tried to move Monsieur de Bey held her back, and then Bruce, her dead husband, came to her with the lost certificate of her marriage. So that when the dreary November day dawned she rose unrefreshed and weary.

A heavy fall of snow had descended during the night, and was still coming down in its feathery, fantastic dance, whilst a bitter east wind blew it in white heaps against gate-post and window-sill, causing it to fall in showers from the boughs on which it had rested as a shroud, making Nita shiver whilst she looked out on the wintry scene.

"Perhaps it may clear before I start," she said, while dressing, but there was but a poor prospect of her wishes being gratified when she descended to the morning-room, to find flakes on flakes adding to the drift blown up against the window.

"Oh, mamma, dear, may I have a game of snowballs with James?" asked Bruce, lifting up his face for the usual kiss, as he turned from watching the white, dazzling shower on the entry of his mother.

"No, no, darling," was the reply; "not unless it clears," and when breakfast was brought in a few moments later, the boy ate but little, whilst his eyes watched for the break in the storm.

It came at last, the sun coming out, throwing a dazzling whiteness over the fresh strewn snow, when Mrs. Morven started on her momentous journey, leaving Bruce in full enjoyment of a cottage with James, his bright eyes gleaming with youthful pleasure, whilst a damask hue beamed on his merry face.

CHAPTER X.

MADAME CLOVILLE'S CONFESSION.

MADAME CLOVILLE, with Monsieur de Bey, were awaiting her at the lawyer's office when she arrived, the latter shaking her hand with a friendly grasp, after which he introduced her to his companion, but Juanita advanced to the latter, saying in French,—

"No introduction is necessary. Is it, madame? I hope you do not forget me. I remember you as though it was yesterday that I stood at the altar, and your husband gave me away," and her voice shook.

"Yes, yes!" replied the woman, and she was about to say more when Mr. Tremell informed them that Mr. Ridgway was ready, and would see them.

The latter was much in the same position as when Nita first saw him, and after preliminary introduction and formality, all of which, owing to the fact that every word Madame Cloville uttered had to be interpreted, occupied much time, but to the lawyer's question as to what she

could reveal with reference to the abstracted leaf she was about to reply, when Mr. Ridgway, placing his hand on the spring bell, requested her to stay until his clerk, Mr. Tremell, entered, when, on the appearance of that gentleman, she commenced,—

"It is now nearly nine years ago since my husband was verger of the Protestant church at Marcella, my duties being to clean the same and show people to their seats. We occupied a little cottage just outside the town, and one morning an English lady and gentleman applied to be married. The former was very young, a girl scarcely out of her teens, though we think little of that in sunny France; but a something there was in her face, which drew my attention more particularly to her. She was the image of a man I once knew, a bad man, and I felt more than curious respecting her. After the ceremony, of which I and my husband were the sole witnesses, we adjourned to the vestry to sign our names; the bridegroom's name was Leslie, the bride's maiden name Nelson."

All but Madame Cloville, who insisted on standing, were seated, Mr. Tremell's bony fingers rapidly taking down in shorthand the sentences as they fell from the lips of the interpreter Mr. Ridgway had procured for the occasion, and with the exception of their voices and the clerk's busy pen, not a sound escaped the lips of those assembled as she proceeded:—

"I was prepared for the first name, it was that of the man I have mentioned, but why it should not have belonged to the girl, as I expected it would do, I was at a loss to understand. I mentioned it to my husband, who was equally struck with the likeness, and it so puzzled us both that I begged of him to abstract the register, feeling an inward conviction it would lead eventually to the discovery of the man I was anxious to find."

"What was your reason, madame, for such antipathy towards the person you mention?"

"Because he ruined my sister's child, dear to me as my own; because he married her, only to forsake her and the child, which, when dying, she begged of me to protect," she replied, with warmth.

"Her name," cried Nita. "Was it Marie?"

Madame Cloville turned as she spoke.

"Yes," she answered, "Marie, and her seducer was—"

"My father!" the former replied.

"I thought so," returned the Frenchwoman, "and that was why I stole the certificate, which, after much persuasion, my husband permitted me to do. I hoped then, prayed almost,

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that his daughter might be forsaken as my poor girl had been; but the names puzzled me, as I said before, and not only did it occur to me that by abstracting this leaf," and she drew the certificate from her bosom, "that it would be the means of bringing me again before my child's murderer, but that it might lead me to recover the boy who after awhile was removed from my care, and taken I know not whence."

Juanita was too busy with her own thoughts to mark the change which had come over the Curé when his eyes fell on the name on the certificate which madame had previously mentioned—the former in her great happiness at the recovery of the paper which would clear her's and her boy's name from the dishonour which had enveloped it, forgetting for the moment the promise given to her father on his death-bed to seek out that father's son.

Madame Cloville paused, waiting for others to speak, till Mr. Ridgway, exulting over the fact that by her confession and the restored document it would fall to his lot to reinstate Lady Bruce Leslie—no longer Mrs. Morven—to her right position, put the question relative to the child she had named, if she had, as she had hoped to do, succeeded in finding him!

"Yes," she replied, with alacrity, "he is there," and she pointed towards Monsieur de Bey.

Too overwhelmed to speak, the latter covered his face with his hands, whilst the lawyer attracted their attention to the different names borne by the respective parties.

"De Bey was the name of my niece, his mother," Madame answered, "the villain—for he was a villain, although he was Lady Leslie's father—married her (a strange coincidence) under the very name that was through Providence to prove the means of benefiting the one child through the marriage of the other. He was baptized Henri Leslie, but when my poor girl died with her shattered faith and broken heart, I swore that name should never be borne by her son!"

(Continued on page 520)

THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

—107—

CHAPTER XIX.—(continued.)

The few weeks immediately succeeding the establishment of Mary's claims were undoubtedly the happiest in Mrs. Meadows' whole life—happier than her youth, her early married life, her middle age.

The most ecstatic moments were those when she was seated at a counter in the most fashionable shop in Caversham, feeling and looking at rich silks and costly satins, or when she slipped her bony old finger into one long sealakin pailot after another, or tried on bonnet and cap, cap and bonnet.

It was also very agreeable to her feelings to step out of a nice (hired) brougham, and to be received with deference by one of the shop-walkers, and escorted in a kind of procession to whatever department she chose to patronise, bearing Mary in her train.

Mary, now dressed in a totally different style as Miss Darvall, and in a velvet and sable pailot, and toques to match, looked as if she had never been accustomed to any less magnificent style of garments, much less a shabby old waterproof and a two shilling straw hat!

Julia, who met her quite accidentally in the Mall, who had passed her, so great was the transformation in her appearance. When she recognised her she was overwhelmed, and stood and stared.

"Mary! O! course it is Mary! How different you look, and what a wonderful thing it is this discovery about you! I cannot grasp it yet."

"Yes, come in here with me," stopping at the door of a confectioner's, "and let us talk about

It. I can hardly realise it yet myself. Walter, two strawberry ices, please!"

"No more can I," said Julia; "and to think of your being Miss Darvall of Daneford all the time—at least, not all the time, for you and I know that you are not Miss Darvall at all!"

Mary flushed slightly and said, as she removed her gloves,—

"Yes, I am! I never mean to take a name that was, as it were, flung at me. Please don't allude to the subject. You—you know I hate it. You and I are cousins now—is not that nice!"

"Very!" hissed her. "You got my letter, of course? I believe you have been awfully good and generous to us—even papa says so. He and Mrs. D. have come in to-day on purpose to pay you a State visit. And you are out?"

"Yes, as you see; and between ourselves, 'Ju,' I'm not sorry," said Mary, frankly. "The last time, you know, that Mrs. Martin (as she then was) spoke to me was after that horrible trip to Folkestone, and she called me a 'brass-faced hussy.' We must allow a little more time to elapse before we can meet with decent appearance of civility."

"They are going to ask you to Daneford to stay!"

"And I shall decline their kind invitation. I don't like Daneford. It's a gloomy, unlucky sort of place."

"And it is no self-sacrifice to let us stay on," said Julia, with a laugh. "Father said of course we would turn out when you were married, and I could scarcely keep my countenance."

"I don't care about your countenance, but I do care that you keep my secret. Remember that, Ju!"

"I remember. And now what are your plans? Where are you going to live? Mary, you look lovely in that cap and furs!" she added impetuously.

"We are going to live at the seaside. After our humble life near here, we could never settle in Caversham. I believe I have afforded the people a fine nine days' wonder! Mrs. Meadows has a fancy for the sea, and we have taken a large house on the Lees at Folkestone, and whenever we are settled I shall expect you to come and stay with me, cousin Julia."

"And so I will, cousin Mary, with the greatest pleasure! But why did you pitch on Folkestone, of all places?"

"It was not I that settled it; it was chiefly our solicitor, whose friend's house he wanted to let; and as we can take it over—servants, furniture, plate, linen, and all, it suits us—and we are not likely to be as much noticed there where strangers come and go all the year round, as elsewhere. We pass in the crowd."

"Yes; you will simply be known as Miss Darvall, the heiress, as I once was," said Julia, sipping her ice. "How funny it seems! And what about Mrs. Meadows? What are you going to do with her?"

"She is to all intents and purposes my mother, and I shall expect her to be treated as such."

"What a lucky old woman! And you, Marie—I shall call you Marie—what star were you born under, I wonder! Fate has been good to you."

"In some ways, and only lately. For the last twenty years Fate has turned her back on me, and fortune has cut me dead. There! I see the carriage opposite—at the library. You had better run over and say nothing about me dear. I really could not face your father and Mrs. Darvall in a proper spirit, though I shall arrive at it some day."

"Yes, there is the carriage, your carriage, Marie," rising hastily. "Everything we have is yours. I don't know how you can be so generous to us; it is not natural."

"Yes, it is, because I like you. Is not that natural, cousin Ju! Now you really must hurry away! Come in and see me by yourself to-morrow."

The house which Miss Darvall, the heiress (who, from quite humble circumstances, had come into

a great fortune, to quote the gossip of the town), had taken was a splendid mansion facing the sea, with big, cheerful rooms, big bow windows and a sunny aspect, and furnished with luxury and taste, from the hall door to the garrets.

In this abode, with Persian carpets, mirrors, and silk and velvet hangings, poor Mrs. Meadows was completely at sea; her only occupation consisted in walking to and fro and discovering new wonders and dusting the furniture!

The servants could not make her out. Miss Darvall, now, she was a real lady; you could see it a glance. But Mrs. Meadows—what was she! She said, "Sakes alive," and "deary me," and sauced her tea, and ate with her knife; yet Miss Darvall called her mother! Poor Mrs. Meadows did not quibble her domestic for long, nor long enjoy her new surroundings.

Vanity was principally the cause of her end. She had purchased a magnificent silk and lace mantel, and longed to wear it. She foolishly left off her heavy sealskin, donned the new French cloak in spite of all Mary could urge, being a very headstrong old person. More than this, she sat out in an east wind on one of the benches on the Lees, where she caught a chill. Bronchitis succeeded, and in a week Mrs. Meadows was dead.

Mary was very sorry. She now felt herself utterly alone in the world, and although the old lady had occasionally been both trying and tyrannical, Mary was sincerely attached to her, and had the satisfaction of hearing from her dying lips that she had been "the best of daughters."

Mr. Montague came down to the funeral and followed the hearse in the same carriage as Mary, and stayed with her for the remainder of the day.

He was the only friend and adviser that she had. He told her that he had come to two conclusions. One was, that she must have a *chaperon*; and the other, that he thought he would come down and live at Folkestone for a while himself!

Both of these resolutions were very speedily carried out. He came almost immediately and took lodgings not far from his "ward" as he called her, and spent a good portion of the day at "Bellevue," the name of her mansion. In a fur-lined coat and a bath chair he arrived or in a neat little brougham with a high-stepping steed.

He was not nearly so susceptible to the public eye as he had been formerly. Money, as he had once bitterly remarked, drew away attention from his deformity to his purse. He was as sharp-tongued as ever, and rated Mary as soundly as he used to do in the days when they did lessons together in the old shell-house.

"You can't go on living in this big house alone, you know!" he said; "and as to having Julia Darvall to live with you altogether, that's nonsense! You have done enough for her already. She's a good-natured, fine-looking young woman, but that's all. She is not a lady. I doubt very much if she's even a real Darvall, raised in the colony."

"She is as much as I am, and I won't have you say such things, Horace! Her stepmother is detestable, her father is odious, but she is my friend."

"And a rare good one she has found in you, not only in words but in pounds, shillings, and pence. However, to business. I think I've heard of a lady who will do for you as a *chaperon*. She is a distant connection of the Darvall's on the mother's side, and not too well off, not young, and quite a gentlewoman. She is a widow."

"Oh, indeed! and what is her name?" inquired Mary, without any enthusiasm.

"Her name is Mrs. Clare. Her husband was an officer who died abroad. She has no children. I think you will find her everything that you require. She is old enough to *chaperon* you, and young enough to join in your pursuits. Has experience in the ways of the world; and, as far as I can judge from her letters, not merely tact, but brains!"

"I hope she is not too clever by half," thought Mary, but aloud,—

"I'm afraid she will find me but a dull companion. I don't suppose I have any tact, and you have often told me I had not much brains!"

"Merely to keep your conceit down. You have a good deal more than your share! Well, what am I to say to Mrs. Clare? Shall we take her on trial—say for three months? I had a letter from her this morning."

"Just as you please, Horace. I leave it all in your hands. You know what is proper better than I do!"

"Very well, my dear! I'll engage her on trial; say a hundred a year, laundress and travelling expenses. Quite enough for doing nothing but sit at a most excellent table, live in a comfortable home, and drive about in a smart carriage with a very pretty girl."

"Of course you will tell her, or I must, all my antecedents, that I am ill-educated—that I have no friends."

"As much as it is necessary for her to know, my dear. Your bringing up, employment at Daneford, &c. There is nothing specially startling in your past."

"I think there is a great deal! My being reared and brought up by poor people as their own child, and my suddenly stepping into another station, and a large fortune—my scarcely knowing a soul but yourself."

"Yes; very true. That is all out of the common; and what about that little episode at St. James's, Caversham?"

"You mean my christening?"

"I do not! I mean your marriage!" he returned, sharply.

"How can you be so odious! Never—never mention it again."

"Not to Mrs. Clare?"

"Are you insane? Never to a single human being!"

"Oh! very well. As you please, my dear; but it will all come out some day in spite of you!" he returned, rising and stretching out his hand to take his leave. "However, you may depend on my silence, and much good may it do you."

Augusta Clare was a widow, as Humpy had said—a widow with a shallow purse and sharp wits. This invitation to act as *chaperon* to a young heiress, who had been brought up among plebeian surroundings, and who had received a very imperfect education, and never mixed in good society, seemed the very post for which she was born!

She imagined that her charge would be an ignorant, uncouth rustic, who would look upon her as a marvellous being from another sphere, and who would allow her to take the reins of government entirely, and be as wax in her hands. She, Mrs. Clare, would be the real head of the house—dispense hospitality, patronage, and money.

As she travelled South, she lay back in her seat in the railway carriage, and indulged in a variety of very pleasant day-dreams, and built one or two very magnificent castles in the air!

Dreams and castles were alike dispelled by the appearance and style of the young lady who came to meet her. No country bumpkin this, who walked up to her with a firm, but graceful gait, dressed in a neat, tailor-made costume, and followed by an elderly man who was evidently deformed.

"I think you must be Mrs. Clare!" she said, holding out her hand. "We came down to meet you—this is Mr. Montagu."

Here Humpy took off his hat, and eyed his correspondent keenly.

She was not the least the type of woman he had expected—from her letters. She looked much younger than he anticipated, though probably, as he mentally remarked, her youthful appearance was due to Art.

She was extremely well, though plainly, dressed. No trace of the poor companion about her garments, and she was remarkably handsome—teeth like porcelain, which she showed a good deal; jet black hair and eyes, and a brilliant complexion.

She was all radiant smiles and thanks and agreeability, but as she turned and addressed a few words to her future charge, he noted a hardness about her mouth, a subtle, searching glance in her eye, that made him ask himself if he had

done well to engage this lady on the strength of a distant kinship and a few clever letters, without that best test of all—a personal interview!

His heart sank within him as he thought that, for all his care and prudence, thanks to his own vanity and hatred of meeting strangers, he might have thrown his dearly-beloved ward and pupil into the arms of a crafty adventurer! These were his first fears.

A few honeyed words, and a few sunny smiles from Mrs. Clare swept away all his suspicions, and he told himself, angrily, "that he had become so sceptical, and so suspicious, that he would doubt a saint from Heaven!"

Mrs. Clare proved to be a great success—a domestic and social success. She was delighted with everything and everybody, and had a way of administering the most delicate flattery to the whole household.

She praised Mary's air and looks, and voice and taste; she expressed immense reverence for Mr. Montagu's mind and talents, and his conversation she compared with Pope's, Sheridan's, and Sydney Smith's. She praised the maids, the footman, and the cook, and established herself in the good graces of almost the whole household.

The one exception was Miss Darvall, who, doing all in her power to like her companion and *chaperon*, never quite succeeded; and, in spite of Mrs. Clare's brilliant assaults, she never was able to take the citadel of her young friend's confidence—not though she drew spirited sketches of her own past life, and told her what she said was her own history from her cradle till now.

Related episodes of her family—a large one—all girls; of her married life; of her wicked relations who had robbed her, and of her husband who, she declared, worshipped the ground she walked on, and had not a secret in the world from her.

"That's the main thing, dearest" (to Mary), "mutual confidence. You and I must have complete confidence and trust in one another. No secrets. This is the surest basis of true friendship."

And then she would begin and gradually and artfully cross-examine her about her life, as she called it, "of low estate."

Clever little woman as she was, she divined that Mary held some secret in her past, and she used every effort her fertile brain could suggest to discover it. Once she knew it, she believed that she would establish an influence over her charge she was very far from now. Once she knew it, she would have her in her power.

She pumped the lady's maid craftily—nothing to be got out of her. She questioned Mr. Montagu delicately about the dear child's bringing up. Had she any lovers? Any detrimental admirers of that rustic class? Had she ever had a fancy for anyone?

All these questions were cleverly put aside by her astute listener. She gained nothing whatever by cross-examining him, and made up her mind to trust entirely to her own clever wits, and to time, for the solution of a mystery that she was certain was concealed in Mary Darvall's past.

Although there were no confidences between the two ladies, they got on, outwardly, extremely well. Mrs. Clare undertook the housekeeping and servants, which left Miss Darvall at leisure to read and write, and to take lessons in music and French.

Owing to Mrs. Meadows' death, and also to her not knowing a soul in the place, Mary went nowhere save to church on Sundays, and for a drive or walk every afternoon.

This was a very dull life for Mrs. Clare, and by no means the career she had anticipated. What use were all her pretty toilettes—her smiles—her songs? They were just wasted on a cold, unresponsive companion, whose sole object in life seemed to be trying to what she called "improve her mind," and who pored over books, and scales, and exercises by the hour.

In the evenings, as they sat at work, they talked away fluently, and Mary had no hesitation in alluding to her early life—her foster-parents, her employment at Daneford, her friendship for

"Did you know no people besides those up at The Place?" inquired Mrs. Clare.

"One or two neighbours only. My foster-parents always kept themselves very much aloof."

"What a life for a young girl! No wonder you are so terribly grave and silent. You might be forty. You must turn over a new leaf, and enjoy your youth, Marie, my dear."

"I wish I could; but I don't know how."

"Go into society. Society will welcome you with open arms. You are Miss Darvall of Daneford, and that is sufficient introduction."

"But even if I were to go out, I cannot dance or play tennis. I could only sit and look on. I should be a fish out of water."

"You will easily learn those accomplishments. If you shut yourself up from people they will think there is something the matter with you! Mr. Montague, you know, is always urging you to mix with the world!"

"And how am I to begin? It is easier said than done!"

"Join the library, the tennis club, walk on the Lees instead of far out in the country. Be seen! Come with me to hear the band in the Pavilion Gardens this afternoon. I saw a friend of mine in church this morning—a Mrs. Seymour—a very nice woman, and quite a leader in society. If we meet I shall introduce you. She knows all the best people, and has a lovely place near Canterbury. Once you know her, getting into the swim is easy. Once launched, you will enjoy life. Now you vegetate!"

"But perhaps she won't care about knowing me!" said Mary.

"Oh, yes! she will be charmed. You are young, and rich, and you have a history." Mary's cheeks flamed. ("Aha!" said her *chaperon* to herself, "that shot told, though I fired in the air.") She will be quite pleased to have you with her, and make much of you. She is not young, but likes to surround herself with young people, and think she is of the same standing. That's her one little weakness!" concluded Mrs. Clare, who had a good-natured way of saying ill-natured things.

Mary did not require much persuasion. She was getting tired of the sole companionship of Mrs. Clare and her books. She wanted something to stir the dull monotony of her life. And that same afternoon she found herself making the acquaintance of a very elegantly dressed, lively, faded, fashionable woman, who made her sit beside her and talk to her, and with whom she was greatly amazed to find herself discoursing fluently and readily; also with the various people who belonged to Mrs. Seymour's party—two fair-haired girls, a trio of officers from Shorncliffe, and an elderly dandy, who sat a little aloof with Mrs. Clare, and whispered to her, and stared hard at Mary from beneath Mrs. Clare's big lace parasol.

On the whole, Mary enjoyed the change—the novelty, the interchange of chaff and small talk. After all, it was by no means difficult to hold her own in such society. Mrs. Clare was surprised to see her so animated, and to hear her laugh with hearty enjoyment at one of the young men's witticisms.

She was but lately one-and-twenty, and she was human, and only wanted society and amusement to be like other girls.

When the band was over the two parties took leave of one another, Mrs. Seymour promising to call next day, and telling her new acquaintance that, as she was staying in Folkestone, she must see a great deal of her.

After this Mary found herself almost unconsciously walking down the pier—a place she had scrupulously avoided all the time she had lived so close to it.

"What brought us on the pier?" she said, suddenly interrupting an interesting account of Mrs. Seymour's life. "I"—stopping—"never knew we were here. I have been so intent upon listening to you!"

"A great compliment, my dear; but have you any special dislike to this part of the world? You have never been here before, to my knowledge!"

"No. Well, as we are so far, let us walk to the

end." And once there, she turned her back on her companion and looked over into the sea for a long time in dead silence.

"You have some sentiment about this place, dearest!" said Mrs. Clare, insinuatingly.

"I have!" returned her charge, wheeling round almost fiercely, and winking away two tears. "A sentiment of shame. I treated someone very badly—here—on this spot. I—I"—choking down a lump in her throat—"treated—someone—abominably and ungratefully. I did not know it then. I know it now!"

Mrs. Clare walked home beside her charge in silence. Who was this "someone"—man or woman? No further details were to be drawn from her companion.

CHAPTER XX.

THE intimacy between Miss Darvall and Mrs. Seymour grew into friendship, and rarely a day passed that did not find the lady and one or two friends at "Bellevue," to lunch, dinner, or afternoon tea, or that did not see Miss Darvall's smart ponies and bells in front of Mrs. Seymour's door.

Mary went to concerts, cricket matches, and reviews, under her new friend's protection, and began to think that it was rather pleasant, after all, to be young, and rich, and pretty!

The depression that had fallen upon her after her foster-mother's death was clearing off, and it was not often now that she wept, when she was alone, to think that she had no relative that she knew of besides her cousin, Benjamin Darvall, and not a friend beyond "Ju" and Humpty!

Ju had paid her a visit about six months after her arrival at Folkestone, and had been made much of by Mrs. Seymour and set; but the spirits Mary had gained Julia had lost. She was dull and silent, and her laugh and gaiety were alike forced. What had come over her?

In answer to Mary's sympathetic inquiries she said that she was miserable—most miserable at home; that Mrs. Darvall and Captain Burn fought like cat and dog—that her father drank, and there was no use disguising the fact that his temper was at times quite ferocious, and they all trembled before him—that he seemed to get rid of his money in some very mysterious way—betting, she believed; and that the neighbourhood was dropping them as fast as it could! And, oh! how she wished she were back in Australia! How she wished she had never come to England! She wished they had never got rich—that they had always kept to their former station; and she generally wound up all these "wishes" by bursting into tears.

"You have something on your mind, behind all this?" Mary would declare. "And when I have told you all my secrets, I think you might tell me yours!"

Then Julia would shake her head and smile a rather ghastly smile, and declare that she had no secret to divulge. On one topic she delivered her mind very freely—and that was on the subject of Mrs. Clare! She would say, for instance,—

"Mrs. Seymour I like! She may be a little too fond of admiration and having men dangle after her, but she is true and sincere, and very fond of you, Marie—and those Miss Berrys, who are so much with her, are nice girls! But I'll tell you who is a wolf in sheep's clothing—a second Mrs. Martin—only younger and very good-looking; and that's your companion and *chaperon*, Mrs. Clare; I can't bear her!"

This conversation took place in Mary's bedroom, when the home was still and all its inmates were supposed to be asleep, and the two girls were conversing confidentially.

"Why do you say so, Ju?" said Mary, who was blinding her hair.

"I took a dislike to her the first time I saw her! She is a spy—a schemer—an artful, selfish woman, who is one of the most deadly fiends I've ever seen!"

"Phit!" echoed her cousin, in a shocked voice. "Oh, no!"

"Yes! Where are your eyes? She gets hold of eligible, rich, elderly men, and sits behind

doors, and whispers behind fans, and says flattering things to them, and horribly spiteful things of other women! I've heard her myself! She is curious about you, and asked me a dozen sharp questions about you the day after I came, when we went down to the library together all in the most innocent and careless manner, of course; but I was equal to her! She asked if you were really my maid once. I said yes, at first; but latterly you were my companion and *confidante*—the same as she was to you! That was a nasty one for her, was it not?"

"And what did she say to that?"

"Tossed her head and said, 'She was your *chaperon*, but never your *confidante*!'"

"And never will be!" said Mary, with compressed lips.

"She watches you and me like a sign! I see her eyes gazing at us when we think she is reading, and even inspecting us over her tea-cup of a morning—nothing escapes her!"

"I wonder what she expects to find out!" said Mary.

"I'm sure I cannot say! When she saw you poring over the *Army and Navy Gazette*, at the library yesterday, of course I knew what you were reading about. She snatched it up the moment you laid it down, and read the two pages carefully over. I saw her."

"And I don't think she was much wiser, do you?"

"She is good enough to watch me, too, and to examine my letters as they lie on the hall-table! I saw her take them up, one by one, as I looked over the banisters. I hate these eily, suspicious people! And she takes so much on her! Orders the carriage, presses people to come to lunch—and so often!—and treats you behind your back as if you were a cipher! I heard her saying, 'Oh, poor uneducated girl, she is wonderful, considering her bringing up—but—!'"

"Don't repeat any more, Ju!" interrupted her friend, hastily. "I don't want to dislike her, or suspect her, and we are bound together now for another whole year, and I must make the best of it!"

"Who settled that?"

"Horace. She has bewitched him!"

"She has not bewitched me, and I see her game! It is to establish a hold over you that will make her a pensioner for life—either that, or she would have no objection to marrying again!"

"Not Horace!" in genuine alarm. "What should I do?"

"Oh, dear no! Some well preserved colonel or admiral, with plenty of money and plenty of conceits! Insidious flattery is her great weapon!"

"Oh! but you are not fair! She is very good-looking!"

"Yes, she is; but I believe her teeth are false—her hair is dyed—her face made up most beautifully. I grant you that—and in a bedroom, with her back to the light, and especially in that black dress that looks all lace and jet, and with her big red face, she looks handsomer than even you or I with our youth! She studies every glance and every smile, and when I watch her I feel inclined to throw things at her!"

"She is most fascinating, Ju!—Sings divinely, and is a charming companion!"

"Yes, to gentlemen—unless she has something to gain! She is generally very snobby to ladies. She is a snake in the grass!"

"I see you won't allow her one good point."

"No; not one—and let me warn you against her in time, Mary! I believe she is no more and no less than a crafty, self-seeking adventurer! You and your money are to put her well on in the world to fortune!"

"Girls!" said a low voice, opening the door. "It is not possible that you are not in bed yet. You will lose all your beauty sleep, Mary, darling!"

The speaker was, of course, Mrs. Clare, in slippers and a becoming crimson dressing gown. Had she been at the keyhole! Had she heard anything! We know that listeners never hear any good of themselves, if she had been no exception of the rule!

However, she did not betray it! Her face was all smiles as she kissed Mary, embraced Julia, and

playfully banished her to bed. She had wonderful command of her feelings.

Fully six months had elapsed; it was the depth of winter. Mrs. Clare had run up to London, and her charge was alone! Mrs. Seymour had gone home, and her "set" was scattered. Still Mary knew a good many people now; and Horace (ranky from the east winds), came and kept her company for the best part of each day.

One evening Miss Darvall was sitting alone in the dusk. Just before the time, thinking and thinking among other things of Julia, when, strange to say, the drawing-room door opened softly, and Julia herself walked in! She was clad in a long fur-lined cloak, and wore a veil lightly tied over her face; and she looked very pale and haggard in her friend's astounded eyes.

"I just turned the handle, and walked in below," she said, sitting down. "Where," in a lower voice, "is Mrs. Clare?"

"In London—gone for a week's holiday!"

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated Julia, fervently.

"Where did you drop from, Ju! Let me take off your cloak and bonnet, dear! I'm so glad to see you, for I was just wondering about you, and what you were doing! You have not answered my last three letters! Where have you been?"

"Here in Folkestone quite close to you, for the last six weeks," motioning her away, and removing her veil as she spoke.

"Here, Julia?"

"Yes, I'll tell you all about it if you will just be quiet."

"What is that thing you have under your cloak—a dog?" said Mary, leaning towards her.

"Dog—no!" pushing back her wrap, and revealing the outline of a very small, young baby.

"A baby!" ejaculated her friend, starting up. "Where in the world did you find it! Whose is it?"

"Mine!"

"Julia!" nearly shrieked her listener. "What are you saying!"

"Hush! Sit down! You shall hear in half-a-minute! You told me your secret, and I've kept it faithfully! Now you must hear and keep mine! Last year Hector came home, we met quite accidentally in the street. He was sent on business. He has got on in the world. Still he is only a superior steward."

"Yes, go on—don't stop!"

"And we met. I was passing to the carriage and saw him, and it all came back! I nearly fell on his neck and burst out crying. There was no one like Hector, after all—not all the dandies and mashers in London could really compare with him. We went into a bookshop close by and talked—oh! how we talked—and I made him promise to meet me in the Park next day—and we met often. We even went to church together on most Sundays. Time was getting on—in a month or two he had to return, and I persuaded him to marry me—and we were married quietly one morning, and went to Scotland for the honeymoon!"

"And were you not missed at home, or did they know!"

"No; they thought I was staying with a school-fellow in Paris; they never knew."

"And don't they know now!"

"No; they think I have been staying with you for the last two months. All my letters, of course, have the postmark 'Folkestone.'"

"Oh, Ju! And you were married when you were staying here last, and never told me!"

"I was on the eve of it once, only we were interrupted by Mrs. Clare. I was sure you would be angry; but I meant to tell you, and my courage failed."

"And what about your father!"

"Mary! He would kill me if he knew!"

"Where is Hector at present?"

"He went back to Australia; and when I can scrape up enough money I am going to join him; but that won't be, I am afraid, for months. I must go home immediately—and, remember, I have been staying here!"

"And what are you going to do with the baby?"

"I am going to leave the baby with you."

"With me!" echoed the other, with a gasp of horror. "Oh, Julia—no!"

"My dear Mary," said her friend, quite composedly, "you owe it to humanity. When you yourself were a baby you were taken in and kept by kind people, and cared for as their own."

"That is different, Julia. Oh! don't you see it? I had no mother—my father had been turned out of doors—"

"And," interrupted Julia, "don't you think that I would be turned out of doors at Daneford if I arrived there with this child!"

"No, not if you confessed all. Your father knows Hector Campbell; he approved of him once—you told me so."

"Once—yes; but if he knew that I was married to him now I believe he would kill me!"

"Why not write, and break it to him in that way, and stay here till you can join Hector! You can do that easily."

"Hector has gone to a run in the interior; he will be away fully a year, and all my belongings are at Daneford. My diamonds—I could not afford to lose them."

"And what do you propose to do!"

"To return to-morrow, and leave the child here. It is a fine healthy boy, and little trouble. He will be a nice plaything for you, Mary."

"But, Julia!"

"You can say he is a foundling, can you not?"

"I cannot do anything of the sort! What would the servants think! How could I say I found it! What am I to say to Mrs. Clare—to the people I know! I know perfectly well what they would all say. Mary would say it was my own child!"

"And if they did, you could afford to laugh at them," said Julia, serenely.

"No, I could not—no one could. Risking one's good name is no joke—no laughing matter."

"You lost it once before, and it did you no harm!"

"Yes; but that was not of my free will that I lost it then; it would be this time. Besides—"

"Besides, I know you are thinking of Captain Elliot. What would he say!" interrupted Julia, scornfully.

"Yes, I am; for I owe him at least one duty—to keep my name spotless."

"I hope he does as much for you, my dear! Mary! how can you be so stiff, and not do as I ask you! I thought you would have jumped at the dear little fellow" (looking admiringly at the red face in her lap). "Captain Elliot is still in Egypt, and by the time he comes home—say in a year—baby and I will be in Australia."

"Yes, Julia," returned her friend, sarcastically; "you will be safe and sound, but I shall be out of the pale of society, and in the wilderness of disgrace as your scapegoat!"

"That is nonsense!" returned Julia. "And so you won't take the child!"

"Why should you ask me to do such a thing!"

The two young ladies were now getting angry, and the fight was waxing hot over the unconscious infant, that lay in its mother's lap in blissful slumber.

"Because you have always come to my rescue, and surely you would not leave me in the lurch now!"

"When you have managed your private affairs so skillfully so far, and eluded all suspicion, and have a baby and a husband, and yet pass off to the world as Miss Julia Darvall! I do not see that I could do anything in such schemes; I'm not nearly so bold or so clever."

"But you have a husband in the background too," sneered Julia.

"Yes, I know that to my cost," returned the other, calmly.

"And you are no more Miss Darvall than I am! Miss Mary and Miss Julia we are to the world, but, sitting here, face to face, and speaking the truth, you are Mrs. Elliot, and I am Mrs. Campbell."



"GIRLS!" SAID MRS. CLARE, "IS IT POSSIBLE THAT YOU ARE NOT IN BED YET?"

"Yes, and you were married of your own free will, and got into all this intriguing of your own accord, Julia, and I did not; I was passive. More, I was a victim to John Meadows's ambition, and old Mr. Elliot's sense of honour."

"I think you have no reason to complain! They married you to a handsome, gallant, wealthy gentleman."

"Against his will," added Mary. "Do not forget that part of the arrangement; it is rather important."

"Against his will, then; but he would gladly claim you now."

"Very likely; but now I am his equal."

"Yes, but when you were not his equal, when you were only Mary Meadows—a girl in service—he would have claimed you as his wife before the whole world. Don't forget that."

"I forget nothing. There are other things—things he said before my face at Carnegie Park—that I can never forget."

"You are unforgiving, Mary; and, what is more, you are cutting off your nose to spite your face. I'm sure you would be ten times happier, instead of living here a lonely girl, with no belongings, and just casual friends, to have your husband with you—a man who is devoted to you."

"Was—you may speak in the past tense; and even were he as much in love with me as ever, I doubt if his admiration and adoration would stand the test of your baby."

"You must help me, all the same, Mary. You have always done so, and I look to you quite naturally. You wrote my notes, and advised me, in old days; latterly you have been awfully generous to me with money—I mean not only to papa, but those cheques you have given me, and bills you have paid—you dear, good girl!"

"Money is nothing. If this was only money, Julia, you know you would not have to ask twice."

"Hush!" said Mary; "there is someone coming!" hurriedly drawing into the shade, and hastily concealing the child in her lap.

Enter the afternoon tea-tray, and candles brought in by two men in livery. They were promptly followed by two Folkestone ladies, full of spirits, and thirsting, as they said, "for tea and news!"

They were slightly acquainted with Miss Darvall (Miss Julia), and rather wondered that she sat in the shadow of the fire curtains, and did not rise to greet them, but merely gave them a cold and rather (and no wonder) nervous nod! What would they have said had they seen what lay hidden and, most luckily, asleep in her lap!

The party was joined by Mr. Montagu in his long fur-lined coat, which partly concealed his deformity. He was in the habit of dropping in at this hour at Bellevue most evenings. He was amazed to see Julia, but Julia and he had never been friendly. He accepted her distant greeting as a matter of course.

"You look very ill!" he said, abruptly.

"Do I! So do you?"

"When did you come?"

"Quite recently."

"Making a stay?"

"No!"

"Are you not stifled in that heavy cloak!" remarked one of the ladies. "Don't you think (to Mary) she ought to take it off in this hot room? You really look quite faint!" rising and approaching, to Mary's horror.

"Please never mind me—please leave me alone!" returned Julia, with a sharpness that was quite startling; and her would-be benefactor, thus repulsed, sat down again, and took up her teacup with rather flushed countenance.

Meanwhile, Mary, whose nerves were on edge, and who felt almost hysterical at the situation, had been trying to do the honours of the tea-table; but she was awkward—unusually so; she dropped teaspoons with a clang, scattered lumps of sugar, and the cups she handed to her friends literally rattled in their saucers. Supposing the child were to wake with all this loud talking and laughing!

The idea made beads of perspiration stand upon

her temples. These two chatty visitors were the greatest gossips in Folkestone, and went from one tea to another the whole afternoon relating all the choicest bits of scandal—and what a scandal was here!

"Did you hear about Miss Croly—the girl from Leeds, who was stopping with the Smith Jones last spring?" said one of them. "A tall, dashing girl, who rode and dressed, and flirted tremendously. I'm sure you knew her!"

"No; I heard nothing," returned Mary, in a faint voice.

"Then only imagine all these years she has been coming to Folkestone she is a married woman all the time, and passing herself off as a girl, and going about everywhere with a chaperon! What do you say to that?"

Mary was not able to find any appropriate answer, and Humpy gallantly came to her rescue by upsetting his tea, and making a great fuss about his coat and the carpet—so much so that the thread of the ladies' discourse was broken; and after a few disjointed remarks—touching Miss Croly and her husband, who must, of course, have had "good reason of his own" for deserting her, and who was a naval officer on the China station—these visitors at last got up and took their leave; and as Mr. Montagu walked with them to the door Mary rang the bell and bent over, and whispered to her other visitor,—

"Slip out through the back drawing-room, run up to my bedroom and lock the door. I'll be after you as soon as I can get rid of him!"

(To be continued.)

A WRITER has recently described how sham antiquities are made. A Pompeian tile selling for ten shillings is evolved from a medicine-bottle costing less than a penny, and steel files are melted and hammered into Venetian daggers. The final operation is to sprinkle them with nitric acid, to give them an ancient appearance.



"I THINK YOU MUST BE MISS LESTER!" SAID LADY MARY, RISING.

ORDEAL BY FIRE.

—201—

CHAPTER XV.

VERY few women can have had an experience like that which now devolved on Idonie Trefusis. To enter her husband's family as a paid dependent; to see the home that should have been her own, and know that she could never enter it as its mistress; to see that her employer was actually wearing mourning for herself, and to hear those around speaking of her husband's grief for her loss. All this made up an experience which might well have turned Idonie's brain.

But it seemed as though the trial through which she had passed, the ordeal by fire as it might be called, had purified and strengthened the girl's whole nature. She had lost her childish petulance, her wayward discontent; only the best and truest qualities of her heart survived; and the woman who came to Trefusis Rectory as governess to Ronald and Janet was a very different creature from Sir Denzil's idolised wife.

She made two great mistakes (which of us do not make such); of course her wisest plan, her right course would have been to cable to her husband the news of her escape, and then to have gone down to Trefusis and introduced herself to his relations in her own true character. The reasons which held her back were utterly mistaken ones, but she believed in them implicitly.

First of all, Idonie had never quite believed her husband did not repent his marriage. They had been together so little since the episode of Alice Grant, and in their brief meetings Idonie had been really so weak and ill as hardly to be capable of serious talk. She honestly believed Sir Denzil was disappointed in her, and that though he had tried to keep the knowledge to himself her death would have been a relief to him.

That was Idonie's first great mistake. To her mind Sir Denzil would have heard of his freedom and rejoiced at it. It would be bad news to him

to hear of her escape, and so she kept it from him. The other mistake was this—Nan, being dead and unable to testify to the truth of her story, Idonie felt herself utterly at the mercy of Jim Adair. If he indeed knew the Trefusis family, and chose to warn them of the enormities committed by Lady Trefusis's sister, she had now no one to defend her. She might have told her story to Denzil with Nan to help her out; might have explained to him that their change of identity was but a girlish freak; that she had meant no harm, and that, either as Miss Lindsey or Idonie Trefusis, she had done nothing unworthy of his wife.

But Nan was dead. There was no one to stand by her and support her testimony. There was nothing for it but to let the change of identity, made in pure jest, continue for a lifetime, and resign for ever her husband, name, and home.

Perhaps one of Idonie's greatest griefs was that this course left Nan's memory undefended; that if Jim Adair carried out his threat, and told the Trefusis family how shamefully "Miss Lindsey" had treated him, there would be no one to justify the dead girl.

As regarded the future, will it be believed Idonie never troubled! She had lived so long in luxury that, perhaps, she had not the dread of poverty possessed by those who have felt its sting. She knew, of course, she could not remain with Mrs. Trefusis after Sir Denzil's return, but she honestly believed he would postpone his voyage to England on hearing of her own death. Anyway, there were six months or more before he could arrive; time enough for her to obtain a "reference" which would enable her to get another situation. Besides, she had still enough money left to keep her with care for some months.

"What do you think of Miss Lester?" Nora Trefusis asked her husband, after the governess had retired on that first evening at the Rectory.

Archie paused.

"Please—please don't say anything against her," pleaded his wife. "I have taken a great

fancy to her, and you know Mrs. Gresham's letter was quite satisfactory!"

"I don't want to say anything against her, dear; I fancy she has known a great deal of sorrow, and she looks like 'a woman with a history.' But that is the harshest verdict I wish to pass on your *protégée*, Nora."

"And the children have taken to her wonderfully; she has such a gentle way with them."

"She is a lady," agreed the Rector, "and so would have gentle, refined manners. I think you have made a good choice, dear, only—"

"Well?" and she gave a little sigh, "I knew you were going to point out some drawback. What is it?"

"I suppose she hasn't run away from home?" suggested the Rector a little diffidently. "Does it strike you, Nora, that she has never mentioned a single creature she has known, or a place where she has lived; but for Mrs. Gresham's letter, she might have dropped from the sky on to Dover esplanade just in time to answer your advertisement!"

"Well, I like her," persisted Nora. "And, Archie, don't tell your mother what you have just said or she will be imagining Miss Lester an adventurousness of the deepest dye."

"She is not that," said the Rector, firmly. "I'd stake my word there is a secret in her life, Nora; but the secret is sorrow, not sin."

Of course Miss Lester had to be introduced to Lady Mary. The visits between the two houses were almost daily, and the little people at the Rectory thought grandmamma's garden a perfect playground, so that the meeting could not long be deferred, and on the second afternoon after her arrival Idonie found herself walking with the children to River View. She felt very grave—so grave that she could hardly answer the chatter of Ronald and Janet. How she had once dreaded the introduction to Lady Mary! How often she had called her mother-in-law her "gaoler" in speaking of her to Nan, and mourned over the prospect of passing some months in her company. Well, now at least she need not fear

Lady Mary's opinion of her. It was not likely that the mistress of River View would trouble herself much about the young person who was her grandchildren's governess.

Hilda was out. The children barely deserted Miss Lester to hold a conversation with the old Scotch gardener, who was devoted to them, and Idonle found herself alone with a sweet-faced elderly lady, who looked far too young to be Denzil's mother.

Lady Mary was sitting on the verandah which ran along the front of the house. She rose to greet the young stranger deciding privately that Hilda had not said too much in praise of her beauty.

"I think you must be Miss Lester. How is Mrs. Trefusis to-day?"

"She has a bad headache or she would have come to see you. She told me to bring the children and explain her absence." Idonle felt painfully conscious Lady Mary was looking at her keenly; "but as soon as we got inside the garden they ran off to talk to a man who was mowing the grass."

"They are safe enough with Sandy," replied the grandmother, "and we can see them from here. Are you used to children, Miss Lester? I always say these are fine ones, but a little spoilt."

"They are devoted to their mother," said Idonle, thinking sadly of the two babies born to her in India, and how different her life would have been if they had lived."

"Everyone is," said Lady Mary with a smile, "My son did one of the rarest things, Miss Lester, he married a wife who made herself as much loved by his family as by her own. I have lived within a short walk of Mrs. Trefusis ever since she came home to the Rectory, and we have never had a single wry word."

Idonle wondered what Lady Mary would have thought of her other daughter-in-law, but she only asked after Miss Trefusis.

"She is visiting in the parish. Hilda is nearly as good as a curate to her brother. What do you think of Trefusis, Miss Lester, have you seen the park yet?"

"We went to walk there yesterday. It seems a beautiful spot. I could not help thinking it a pity the house should be shut up."

"It belongs to my eldest son in India. I had hoped to welcome his wife early this spring, but she met with a tragic death, and now I fear Denzil's home-coming will be indefinitely postponed. If you are a newspaper reader you will remember the fate of the *Atlanta*. It was burnt at sea within a few days of Brindisi."

"But I thought there were a few survivors," said Idonle.

"Very few. My daughter-in-law may be said to have died to save another," and the old lady told the story of Nan's self-sacrifice as she had heard it from the Rectory, to whom the rescued sailors had related it.

Idonle's eyes filled with tears. Somehow it seemed in some measure to ease her burden of self-reproach. Nan had not lost her chance of life by returning to the cabin on her sister's entreaty. She had given up her place in the boat to another. Well, it was only in keeping with her whole life she had never thought of self.

"I don't wonder you are touched," said Lady Mary; "but the story made me only grieve the more that my son had lost such a wife. She was coming home for her health, and travelling under the care of her sister. Miss Lindsey's life was saved, but she has not troubled to communicate with us. Perhaps she thinks we should blame her for thinking of her own safety before her sister's. My son, who seems to have the highest opinion of her, declares there must be some mistake, and that if his wife died Miss Lindsey would have perished with her; but the Rectory was told of her escape by a lady who left the doomed vessel in the same boat, so there can be no mistake."

Idonle found herself attempting a few words in her own defence.

"It might not have been wilful selfishness that made her desert her sister. I think such a dreadful scene as a fire at sea would paralyse any

one's brain and make them utterly unable to think and judge. You see, the hardest thing of all is, that in a moment of panic they have to take some step which may decide their whole life."

Tea was brought on to the verandah. Some cakes were sent to the children by a servant; but Lady Mary ministered to Miss Lester's comfort just as though she had been an invited guest.

"I hope you will be happy at the Rectory," she said, when Idonle rose to call the children, saying it was time for them to go home; "and if you ever feel lonely and have a spare hour or two, I shall be very pleased to see you here, Hilda, and I will make you very welcome. It sometimes seems to me," went on the old lady, "that Mr. and Mrs. Trefusis are so wrapped up in each other, any one who lived with them must feel just a little outside. They do not mean to be unkind, only I think the sight of a very happy married pair makes a stranger feel her loneliness the more."

"Thank you so much," said Idonle, simply; then involuntarily she added, "how wonderfully you understand."

"Oh, my dear, one does not come to my time of life without knowing what it means to be 'just outside.' When my husband died, and my eldest son came in for the property, I had my first lesson in it. I was nobody when I had been mistress, and then one by one I have had to see others, first with my children, till I have only my youngest girl left to be really mine."

Idonle thought as she walked back to the Rectory that she might have been very happy at River View as Lady Mary's daughter-in-law. Strange that the fate she had so feared should now strike her as an enviable one.

And as the weeks passed on, and the new governess grew familiar with her duties, filling a vacant niche with great satisfaction to her employers, there was one thing every one noticed, that of all the family, she best loved Lady Mary. That to go and spend a leisure afternoon at River View was the greatest treat that could be given her. The Rector and his wife were perfectly satisfied with Miss Lester, only as the summer wore on they wondered sometimes that she never spoke of her past. She never mentioned a single friend; she never wrote or received a letter, and in August Nora knew no more of her than she had done after their first interview at Dover.

"There is some romance connected with her," said the Rector, when they were discussing the mystery, for perhaps the twentieth time. "Do you think her parents wanted her to marry someone against her wishes and she ran away from home?"

"She is an orphan," said Nora. "I asked her the question at our first interview. She said both her parents died within a week of each other, and that—as far as she knew—she had not a single relation in England."

"She has moved in the best society," said Mr. Trefusis. "When my mother took her to that *yate* at Weston the other day, she said she seemed perfectly at home among all the notables."

A very slight shadow flitted over Nora's face. "I don't think it was quite kind of Lady Mary to take her."

"My dear, you made no objection. Hilda was too ill to go, and my mother had two half-guinea tickets for the charity *yate*. There was no question of invitation. Though the affair was in Lady Caradale's grounds, and the Countess opened her house to the visitors, still, any one who had a ticket was welcome."

"Oh, Archie! how provoking you are;" but she smiled and the shadow disappeared. "You surely don't suppose I thought Miss Lester not good enough to go. I meant that when I had found a governess entirely to my mind, it was not kind of your mother to take her into society, and let her be seen by people who might want to rob me of her."

The Rector smiled.

"I remember now my mother said she was much admired. Don't be frightened, Nora. I am afraid it is too practical an age for any

wealthy suitor to come to woo a penniless maiden."

And meanwhile, in the pleasant airy school-room Idonle sat upstairs, face to face with a problem which seemed almost to drive her distracted. Among the people she had met at Weston was a certain Sir Reginald Fairfax, an old Baronet of courtly manners and genial kindness. He had been most attentive to Lady Mary and her young companion, evidently he had a great regard for the gentle widow. Idonle had been perfectly at ease till he suddenly announced that he expected his nephew James Adair the following week, and should certainly bring him over to Trefusis.

"He has met your son in India, he was actually a fellow passenger of your poor young daughter-in-law. I am sure it would be a melancholy satisfaction to you to hear anything Jim can tell you of her."

Now Lady Mary had never accepted the view taken by Douglas and Hilda of Mr. Adair's conduct. She did not, like the two who had heard Mrs. Marsh's story, believe that Miss Lindsey was in no wise to blame for refusing Mr. Adair, and that he had actually persecuted her with his attentions, therefore, instead of making some shilly-rejoinder Lady Mary declared she should be delighted to meet Sir Reginald's nephew, and hoped he would bring him over to River View soon.

Now Idonle was face to face with difficulties. Probably there would be no notice in the Rectory of Mr. Adair's visit. She might be sent to River View with the children come afternoon and meet her enemy face to face, or some day, when she was sitting under the spreading chestnut tree in the Rectory garden, Hilda and the visitors might stroll over from the Tower House.

Would James Adair know her again? and knowing her would he denounce her to her present employers?

These were the two questions which haunted Idonle waking and sleeping, making her look so pale and troubled that gentle Nora Trefusis had more than once asked her if she felt ill.

To look on the hopeful side first. Idonle knew that she was greatly altered, the bright gaiety, the childish petulance, the April spirits which had first attracted Jim were gone, then the elaborate toilettes, the dainty attire she had worn on board the *Atlanta* were in striking contrast to the plain black dresses which were now her invariable garb. She had altered the style of her hair, the short fluffy curls which had fallen on her forehead were combed back now, and her wavy tresses were coiled tightly round her head, leaving her broad white brow bare, so that you could see plainly how clearly the blue veins showed through her delicate skin. Idonle knew and felt within herself that she was a striking contrast alike to the gay fairy who had flitted about on the quarter-deck of the *Atlanta* and to the wan terrestrial creature whom Adair had last seen at Brindisi.

Then, too, there was another chance in her favour. This was the very last place where Mr. Adair would expect to find her. If she must take a dependent situation, then with all the world before her it was passing strange that she should elect to live among the very people to whom Adair had threatened to announce her.

"Of course I could go away," mused the poor girl. "I could invent some excuse for leaving immediately, but I cannot bear to do it. I am not happy here, I never shall be happy again; but at least it is pleasant to be among Denzil's people and hear of him sometimes. I would rather stay here than go out again among strangers. After all, Mr. Adair is only coming once to River View, and surely I may hope to escape meeting him."

Miss Trefusis was generally a dutiful daughter, but she possessed strong opinions of her own, and when she heard of her mother's invitation to Mr. Adair, she spoke her mind pretty freely.

"Invited that man here! Mother, how could you do it, Douglas and I told you how horribly he spoke of that poor Miss Lindsey."

Lady Mary bridled a little.

"My dear, I have the greatest esteem for Sir Reginald, and I could not put such a slight on

him as to refuse to receive his nephew. Besides, I believe both you and Douglas are prejudiced. After all we know nothing in Miss Lindsay's favour, and even the lady you met on the ship did not deny that it was her folly which sent Idonia back into danger."

"We know a little of Miss Lindsay from Denzell's letters," said Hilda.

"Oh, my dear, men are easily deceived. If Miss Lindsay had had nothing to be ashamed of, do you suppose she would not have written to us in all these weeks?"

"She may have thought it would seem like asking us to help her."

"Nonsense," said Lady Mary, "the case is clear enough to me. She knew that she had behaved badly to Mr. Adair, and she feared we should have heard of it and so kept out of our way, that is my opinion, Hilda."

It was not her daughter's; but, having relieved her mind, Hilda said no more of her objections, and only asked when Adair might be expected.

"He is to come to Sir Reginald's next week, and his uncle hopes he will remain for a month or two. He is in England on a year's leave, but it is quite possible he may not return to India at all."

"Why not?" asked Hilda, laconically. She felt there was more behind.

"Well, you see, the death of that poor young Fairfax has rather altered his position. Of course the property is not entailed, but it is entirely at Sir Reginald's disposal, and if he found this nephew likely to make a worthy master of the estate, he might—"

Hilda smiled.

"Happily, Sir Reginald is a very clear-sighted man. I don't think he will be taken in by any acting, however skilful."

"I think you are most cynical, Hilda. I do not like your style of conversation at all."

"You see, mother dear, I have met Mr. Adair. I rather fancy when you see him you will agree with me."

"The Priory is such a beautiful place," said poor Lady Mary, nearly in tears, "and quite an easy drive of Trefusis."

"I don't understand," said Hilda, bluntly. "What has Mr. Adair to do with that? We have always driven over to see Sir Reginald when we felt inclined. I don't suppose his nephew will object to our visits."

"You won't understand me, Hilda; you are Sir Reginald's godchild, and he is very fond of you. If only poor Arthur had been a few years older I know he would have wished you to be his daughter-in-law; but Mr. Adair is now your own age, and—"

"Oh, mother," and Hilda laughed outright. "I never thought you would degenerate into a match-maker. Dear, don't you know that I put away all thoughts of love and marriage long ago? I will stay here while you want me; but when you don't require your old maid-daughter any longer I shall go into some London hospital and devote my life to the sick and dying. That is my future, mother dear, and I do assure you neither James Adair nor any other living man has power to turn me from it."

Lady Mary felt disappointed. Matrimony may not have proved a bed of roses to a mother, yet she invariably prefers it to any other profession for her daughter.

It must be confessed that this conversation did not dispose Miss Trefusis any more favourably towards Mr. Adair. She hoped with all her heart that Sir Reginald would forget his promise of bringing his nephew over to River View, or that if they came she might be out.

But fortune which is said to favour the brave, did not on this occasion favour Hilda. Sir Reginald was far too much attached to Lady Mary to forget any invitation of hers, so the very day after Jim's arrival he suggested taking him over to River View, and as Mr. Adair had a very lively curiosity as to the fate of the girl who had scorned his love, he was very ready to fall in with his uncle's views.

"Is there a Miss Lindsay staying at River View?" he asked.

"There's no one living there but Lady Mary and her daughter. The third son, a barrister, is

expected down next week. I think you know him."

"I was at school with Douglas Trefusis—an awful prig."

"I never thought him that though; I think the Rector's the flower of the family—excepting Hilda."

And then, straightway, Mr. Adair perceived what was expected of him. He knew, none better, that the Priory was entirely at his uncle's disposal, and he began to understand that his chance of inheriting it would be greatly increased if he took a wife of his uncle's selection.

"I haven't the least desire to marry anyone," he mused that night over his cigar. "I believe I was worse hit than I thought at the time by that Miss Lindsay, for I can't get her face out of my head, and I'd marry her to-morrow if she'd have me. Still she made it pretty clear she would have nothing to do with me, and the Priory is worth a sacrifice. I'll let the old man take me over to River View to-morrow, and introduce me to his godchild."

They drove over in the afternoon, and left the dog-cart at the "Trefusis Arms," for Lady Mary had only a very small stable, and had put down all conveyances except a low basket carriage on her husband's death. Then they strolled leisurely through the village, and reached River View just as the dainty tea equipage had been arranged on the verandah. Lady Mary welcomed them both with kindly warmth, but though Hilda greeted her old friend cordially her bearing to his nephew was decidedly cold.

"We have met before," she said, as Sir Reginald introduced him.

"And under rather painful circumstances," said Jim, who had the gift of a ready tongue; "but, Miss Trefusis, I hoped you would have forgotten how I unwittingly offended you on that occasion. May I ask if you have ever heard anything of Miss Lindsay since?"

Lady Mary was busy with the teapot. Jim sat next to Hilda, and by lowering his voice contrived that no one else should hear the question.

"Nothing."

"I am afraid," and his voice was again lowered to a confidential tone. "I am afraid I may have spoken rather more bitterly than I intended; but you must make allowances for a disappointed man."

"Indeed?"

"Of course it was only a passing fancy," he assured her, "most men have such before the love of their life comes to them. The close intimacy on board ship is responsible for many ill-suited marriages. I have learned since, Miss Trefusis, that mine would have been one of them. I can forgive Miss Lindsay freely for rejecting my addresses. I can go further, and say I am grateful to her for the refusal which has left me free to make a wiser choice."

"What a pity she is not here to receive your gratitude."

Adair never saw the satire of the speech.

"Yes," he answered, cheerfully. "I wonder what has become of her? I quite believed I should find her here."

"Probably she believed your threats."

"Threats!"

"I was told by a fellow-passenger of yours both that you had threatened Miss Lindsay if she appealed to my mother for even a temporary home to denounce her as a fast unprincipled flirt."

"A man says foolish things in the first flush of annoyance," admitted Adair; "but I never meant it. Don't you think you could forgive me, Miss Trefusis, and let us be friends?"

They were interrupted.

Lady Mary was asking some question about the ill-fated *Atalanta*. Adair crossed to her side, and for the rest of the visit devoted himself to her.

"A charming young man," was her verdict when the guests had left.

Hilda kept silent.

"You provoking girl," said her mother, reproachfully. "Won't you confess that Mr. Adair is nicer than you expected?"

"I am afraid I think worse of him than I did before."

"Worse!"

"Well, you see," explained Hilda, "if he had been frantically and madly in love with Nan Lindsay I should have had more sympathy with him. Of course it was a cowardly thing to do to try and frighten her into accepting him; but one can forgive a good deal to a man very much in love; but now he actually turns round and assures me it was not love at all, but a sentimental fancy, brought about by the close companionship of being fellow-passengers. He is, he declares, intensely grateful to her for refusing him. I must confess, mother, that after this the chief feeling I have for Mr. Adair is contempt."

And then Lady Mary saw that she must give up all hope of the young barrister as a son-in-law.

CHAPTER XVI.

HAROLD DYNEVOR thought that the worst of his troubles were over when he and his darling were once safely on board the foreign steamer; but he little knew the difficulties he had yet to cope with.

The *Juanita* was a small Portuguese trading vessel, chiefly used for cargo, and having very limited accommodation for passengers. Of these latter there were six on board. Not one of them could speak a word of English, and the only feminine presence on the ship was poor Nan's own.

There was no doctor, no stewardess, the cook and the steward were responsible for the comfort of all on board. The Captain and his two mates were as ignorant of English as the passengers; but the former had frequently been in France, and knew a little of the French language as spoken in the extreme South. His French was as different from Harold's as well could be; but by dint of speaking very slowly, and making use of numerous signs, Mr. Trevlyn managed to explain his plight in some wise to the Commander of the *Juanita*.

He said that he and his friend had escaped from a shipwrecked vessel, that they were bound for England, and he should be glad to recompense his host most liberally if he would land them at some port where they could procure a passage home, to which the Spaniard replied civilly enough that they were welcome to the best he had to offer on board, that the *Juanita* was cruising towards the Italian coast, where she had to call at several small ports too insignificant to be visited by larger steamers. He did not think there would be direct communication with England from any of them. He would take the shipwrecked pair on to Genoa if the gentleman preferred; but, for his part, seeing the lady's delicate state, and that there was no doctor or female attendant on board, he would advise their landing at Penada, where they were due the following day. It was a small town with fair shops. They would certainly find good accommodation at the hotel, and the assistance of a doctor.

Poor Dynevor was almost beside himself. As far as he went personally the perils he had undergone had done him no permanent injury. A good night's rest, plenty of good food, and he would soon be as well as ever; but with Nan it was far otherwise. She had never moved or spoken since they brought her on board and laid her in one of the vacant cabins. Dynevor knew nothing of illness, but he felt his darling needed the best of skill and the most devoted nursing; both were impossible to secure on board the *Juanita*. Then it was clear, from the captain's remarks, he believed the rescued pair to be man and wife. Harold had spoken of Nan as his "friend," because he could not decide by what name to allude to her, but this had only confirmed the mistake, since in France a husband usually alludes to his wife as "*Mon amie*" (my friend). She might be ill for weeks. She might even leave him for the silent land without recovering consciousness; it was impossible to wait to consult her. He must decide alone.

He knew that Nan loved him, that she had promised to be his wife. He had some months' leave before it was necessary for him to take up his duties in the English branch of the bank he

had just left. It seemed to Harold Dynevor that his best course was to follow the captain's suggestions and land at Penada. He could take rooms at the hotel for himself and his sister, and would write to the head of the London branch of the bank saying he had been saved from the wreck, but was detained in Italy by the dangerous illness of a friend.

As soon as he could obtain English papers, and see who had survived from the *Atalanta*, his plans would be easier. Angry as he was with Idonie for sending her sister into peril, he would not for worlds have added to the agony of suspense that, if spared, she must be enduring. If Idonie still lived he would send her news of Nan as soon as he could discover her whereabouts; but first he must ascertain how that wilful little lady had explained her caprice to her husband's family. The changed identity of the two sisters was but an extra difficulty. If Idonie had perished, why, then he had it from Nan's own lips that there was no one else in the world with a claim on her, so if the waters had, indeed, closed over the pretty, graceful girl who had been the belle of the *Atalanta*, why, then his darling was utterly and entirely his own.

Harold Dynevor recompensed his rescuers in such generous fashion that they were quite content with their gains. He found Penada to be a quaint little Italian town, hardly known out of its own country, but trading considerably in a particular kind of oil which was, indeed, the cause of the *Juanita* calling there. The residential part of the little place lay a good way back from the sea, and on the top of a hill was (Dynevor could hardly believe his good fortune) a very fair inn (it could hardly be called an hotel in his eyes), whose landlord actually possessed an English wife.

Signora Gabrielli had come to Italy originally as maid to an English lady; her invalid mistress was taken ill and died at Penada after a winter there. Her husband recompensed the maid handsomely for her care; but had no longer need of her services. The liberal present given her seemed to the innkeeper a perfect fortune, they married on the strength of it, and had never regretted their bargain, though after ten years of wedlock there was nothing Italian about the Signora except her name, and she had even given her fair complexion and flaxen hair to the tribe of children who played in the old garden behind the house. To the Signora Gabrielli Mr. Dynevor explained the position. The lady with him was his betrothed wife, they had escaped from a burning ship at peril of their lives. After much suffering and suspense they had been rescued by a passing ship, but his fiancée had never recovered consciousness, and he had landed at Penada to obtain medical skill for her.

The signora *née* Jane Pratt, replied that there was a very good doctor close by, and she herself would nurse the poor lady; but as for two fiancés to be travelling alone together would certainly shock the good surgeon, she thought it would be better in every way if her guests were known as Mr. and Mrs. Dynevor.

Harold yielded the point at once. If Nan lived it was his greatest desire to give her his name. He could not see that by letting her bear it before she had a legal right to it he was injuring her, so he gave way to his hostess, and when the silver-haired doctor appeared he was introduced to his patient as Mrs. Dynevor.

Happily Harold had plenty of money in his pocket. He went into the town and purchased all needful toilet requisites for himself and his "wife." He gave the Signor Gabrielli a handsome instalment on account of their board, and then he wrote a long letter to England to his future chief, giving all particulars of his own rescue, and saying he was detained at Penada by a friend's illness. He did not, however, trouble to mention that the friend was a lady.

For two days the old doctor declined to express a verdict, then he said that some terrible mental strain had led to Mrs. Dynevor's present state. That he believed brain fever was fast coming on, and he thought, indeed, a long and serious illness would be the only chance of saving her reason.

She had suffered too much, borne too much

in secret. She needed perfect rest, freedom from all care. She must be worried about nothing, troubled about nothing. And, really, for his part, he thought these conditions would be best complied with while his patient was too ill to rouse herself, and must be treated in all things as a child.

A Sister of Mercy from the neighbouring convent came to help the Signora, and then began a time which Dynevor never looked back on without a faint sick horror—a time when they watched by Nan for days and weeks while the cruel fever seemed sapping her strength, and they could not tell whether she had only been saved from the wreck of the *Atalanta* to fill a lonely grave in this remote Italian town. In those days Dynevor thought of nothing, cared for nothing but Nan. His thoughts and fears, his hopes, were all bounded by her sick room. Letters came from England congratulating him on his escape, but he did not heed them. The English papers, with a full account of the fate of the *Atalanta*, were sent out to him at his request, and he read among the list of those that perished the name of Idonie Trefusis. He felt then that Nan's sacrifice had been in vain.

Of course he was thoroughly exhausted by grief and suspense, or it would have occurred to him that as everyone on board the *Atalanta* knew Nan as Lady Trefusis the name in that fatal list might be meant for her, not for her sister; but this idea never once struck him.

In one paper was the account of the two sailors who described themselves as the sole survivors of the crew and passengers in the second boat. To Dynevor this meant the boat in which he himself had placed Idonie. He counted the large boat lost in the launching as the first. No doubt this was what led him astray, this and his worry of mind, for after perusing those newspaper accounts Harold had not the faintest doubt that Sir Denzil Trefusis was a widower, and his own Nan sisterless.

And so the time wore on till the night came which was to see the crisis of Nan's illness. For days past she delirium of fever had left her, and she had lain in a sort of stupor. At midnight the doctor said the change would come. She would recover consciousness and pass from that stupor into the health-giving slumber of convalescence—or into the deeper sleep of death.

How he prayed his darling might be spared to him, only Harold knew. Had Nan been really—what those around believed her—his wife, he could not have been more anxious. Would she be given back to him, to bear his name and give him love for love, or would she pass from his caresses to those of a sterner bridegroom—death.

Harold gathered nothing from the face of the Italian doctor, which was inscrutable. He had placed himself where, when Nan opened her eyes, they must rest first on his face, and then he waited for the crisis—waited in an agony that he never forgot till the last moment of his life.

(To be continued.)

THE ocean was once merely brackish and not salt, as it is now. This was when the earth was in its first youth and before there was any land showing at all or any animal life in the water. At this time the water was gradually cooling from its original state of steam, and the salts were slowly undergoing the change from gases into solids. Then came the appearance of land, and later on rivers, which gradually washed down more and more salts, while at the bottom of the ocean itself chemical action was constantly adding more brine to the waters. At present it is estimated that there are in the world's oceans seven million cubic miles of salt, and the most astonishing thing about it is that if all the salt could be taken out in a moment the level of the water would not drop one single inch.

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A RIGHTED WRONG.

—302—

(Continued from page 512.)

"I do not think we need detain madame any longer," Mr. Ridgway said, as discharging Tremell to his office, he informed the interpreter his further services were dispensed with, and invited the new-found brother and sister alone to remain; but the uncomfortable, lost expression which came over the countenance of the poor woman caused a smile to become visible on that of the Curé, who informed the lawyer that, owing to the former being unable to speak a word of English or know a step of her way, it was imperative she should await their going.

"Well, then," returned Mr. Ridgway, "I can only congratulate you, Lady Leslie, on the issue of our interview, and I will to-day give instructions to my clerk that he shall at once advise Sir Hubert of the turn affairs have taken."

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST RIDE.

As Sir Hubert Leslie had informed Saddler, he carried out his intention to join the meet, which it had been arranged should assemble on the grounds of Staveley Park.

The morning broke with the grey prophetic of a glorious day, a prophecy fully realised, when a little before eleven the sun came out with a brilliant glow over the scarlet coats of the huntsmen, as they laughed and joked; impatient as the hounds themselves of the delay, while they awaited the coming of the Baronet.

Eager as the latter had been to join the prospective chase, a feeling almost akin to fear had suddenly taken hold of him when the day arrived.

As with Belshazzar of old, at the feast of the preceding evening, the writing on the wall appeared to his heated imagination, till his whole frame trembled as he contemplated the coming of the morrow.

"It won't do to show the white feather," he said, "I am out of sorts, that's all, so here goes," and with the aid of his valet, he donned the scarlet coat and white breeches, staying but one five minutes at the nursery-door, where nurse, with the little Florence in her arms, stood awaiting him, when pressing the babe to his bosom he imprinted his after kiss on her infant brow, and hastily descended the stairs.

Nero was impatiently pawing the hard ground when his master approached, and Saddler even ventured to give the latter a word of caution about his being uncommon fresh, when Sir Hubert vaulted into the saddle, and with a neigh of delight Nero flew like the wind to where the others were assembled.

"Hey day, hey day," said the old gardener, who was watching from the park gates the bright glow of scarlet, as the huntsmen disappeared in the distance.

"Now what's the matter?" and turning round John encountered one of the groomes who had approached silently over the snow. "What on earth are you heydaying about now? You are always sighing and groaning like the wind on a winter's night."

"Well, if you must know, boy, I was a thinkin' of my poor old master, who's dead and gone."

"Colonel Nelson. Well, what about him?"

"Who told you I lived with Colonel Nelson?" asked John, turning angrily on his companion.

"Why you did yourself," the boy replied, laughing.

"Oh! well, maybe I did—maybe I did. I lived so long with the old gentleman that we, that's him and me, was a trimmin' his favourite rose trees, he would talk to me quite friendly like; and one day he says, says he, when his little grandson came a runnin' up to us, 'John, that little fellow is the heir to Staveley,' an' then when the child run off to play he told me how that his daughter, Mrs. Morven as they called her, was married to Sir Bruce Leslie, but that somehow or the other the certificate got lost."

"Hallo, master, what ha' you got for us this fine morning!" The party who thus caused John to suddenly stop in his narrative was the postman, who was on his way to the house with the letters, of which the former, anxious as they said to save his legs, relieved him, when after a short gossip they parted.

There were four or five addressed to different servants, and circulars for the Baronet, with the exception of a blue envelope, the name and address written in a lawyer's hand, and bearing the London postmark, which, after being duly examined by John, who had forgotten about his story, was passed to the groom, in whose hands it went through another examination, to be at last conveyed with the rest to their proper destination.

In the house itself servants were running to and fro, making preparations for the guests, who were expected to return at two o'clock, when the butler, who was decanting wine in the dining-room, had had his attention attracted to the window, by his catching sight of a man on horse-back, who was riding towards the Park at a furious rate.

"Run, quick!" he called to a footman who had been assisting him, "there something amiss, I am afraid."

He had scarcely uttered the words when the rider came dashing up to the hall door; and on the same being opened, but a few minutes sufficed to show them how matters stood.

"They are bringing Sir Hubert home," the man said breathlessly; "have everything ready, and send off immediately for a doctor."

"He isn't dead, then?" asked the butler, who lost no time in summoning Mrs. Hazell, the housekeeper, that she might hear what the man said.

"No, not dead," was the reply, "but dying. But never you mind about the doctor; direct me to the nearest one, and I'll be off."

Scarcely had he again plunged the spurs into his horse's reeking sides when a procession was seen approaching from the park gates, as, on a hurdle, with his eyes (on which the glaze of death was already gathering) raised to Heaven, they bore the Baronet to the house he would never again leave alive.

All that could be was done; but from the first the physician knew the case to be hopeless. Sir Hubert but once opened his lips to inquire for his baby girl, and when they brought her to him he pressed one parting kiss on the baby face, and breathing one prayer for her happiness they closed for ever.

Yes; Sir Hubert was dead, sleeping his last long sleep in the narrow bed where they had laid him, peaceful as the flowers loving hands had placed on his senseless clay; and the blue letter, which was to have told him that his lands had passed from him, lay unopened on his library table.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

STAVELEY PARK once more, but this time with no beating rain to damp its beauty—no feathery snow to spread its white coverlet over the rich green grass—but with the bright warm rays of a glorious spring sun, enhancing the splendour of its emerald slopes and shining waters.

A girl, also in the springtide of her marvellous beauty, is gazing from the window, which commands a view of its loveliest spot, whilst a young man of about three and twenty toys with the masses of her golden hair, on which a passing sunbeam has thrown its shining light.

"Oh, Bruce! my boy! I did not know you had returned. Have you been home long?"

"No, mother, dear," he replied, as advancing to meet a lady who just entered the room he affectionately kissed her. "I came back last night when you were all in bed, or rather early this morning, I should say, much to the disgust of Watson, who looked inclined to eat me, on my arrival, for having kept him from his bed. I was awfully sorry, as I told him; but having no control over wind or tide, and being unable to cross

from France to England without water, it really was not my fault."

"Well, Bruce, I really must take Watson's part, as I think you might have stayed in London until the morning."

The young man's face became unusually red at his mother's remark, when, turning to the girl still standing by the window,—

"You don't think so, Florrie, do you?" when Lady Leslie, remembering how matters stood, felt bound to overlook his impatience, when she considered the magnet which made Staveley for him the dearest spot on earth.

"And so, mother dear, you are determined to leave us!" asked Florence, who, advancing from the position she had taken, threw her arms around the elder lady's neck, pressing her soft cheek against her own.

"Yes, darling, when you and Bruce are married I shall go to Marcelle to my brother, and as we don't live in the day of stage coaches, and when steamers were unknown, why, our separation will be nothing very dreadful, after all; besides, my child, you will have your husband, and I feel sure you would not be so selfish as to deprive Monsieur de Bay of the only happiness he longs for in his lonely life—the society of his widowed sister."

"No, no!" replied the girl, whilst she imprinted fond kisses on her more than mother, Lady Leslie, who when coming to the home left vacant by the death of Sir Hubert took to her bosom the fatherless babe, bringing her and Bruce, her own boy, up with equal care and love until the young hearts, bound together in childhood, developed into a closer tie as their love matured.

And so, a few days later, the morning's sun burst forth with a gladness light on the youthful face, as, like a snowdrop, her lovely head drooped beneath her veil of Honiton lace, and the bells rang out with a joyous peal, as they heralded forth the marriage of Sir Bruce Leslie.

One more peep into a cottage far away, where within its ivy-covered porch sits Lady Leslie, still retaining the beauty which, though matured, is not less fair than on that day when, in the long ago, she aroused the sympathy of the unknown brother, with whom now she trusts to end her days, whilst Madame Clerville is established beneath the same roof, in the position of housekeeper to her foster-son.

[THE END.]

IF I BUT KNEW.

—1891—

CHAPTER XXV.

FOR long hours after the doctor had left Rhoda, she wept so bitterly over the fate of her little child that Miss Walsh grew alarmed.

"Crying will not bring the baby back," she said. "Heaven knew best whether it was to live or die. You must not rail against the judgment of Heaven."

She felt that she must draw her mind into another channel.

"Say that you will be more composed when I see you again," she replied, earnestly, "though it may not be for some days."

"I will try," murmured Rhoda, with a sigh. "Will it be long before I see you?" she added, wistfully.

"I am going to my niece's wedding," answered Miss Walsh. "I may remain a few days after at the house."

Rhoda drew a long, deep sob.

"How strange the word 'marriage' sounds to me now," she moaned. "When I hear of a young girl's marriage nowadays, I earnestly pray Heaven that her husband may not deceive her."

"I am sure that there need be nothing to fear in this instance," said Miss Walsh. "My niece sent me her *Ranée's* picture this morning. He seems to be a noble young fellow. By the way, I will show it to you," she added, believing that the one thing needful was to divert the girl's mind.

Thoughtless as to what would accrue from her action, Miss Walsh drew a small case from her pocket and touched the spring.

The lid flew back, disclosing a magnificent affair in ivory—the portrait of a young and handsome man.

"He has an honest look in his eyes, and a fair, open countenance," said Miss Walsh. "It was painted three years ago."

As she uttered the words, she handed the portrait to Rhoda.

One glance, then a cry of the wildest horror broke from the girl's white, terrified lips.

"Heaven have mercy!" she gasped, "it is he!"

Miss Walsh sprang to her feet, quite as white and terrified as Rhoda.

"You—you do not mean to say that this is the man who wrought all your woe?" she cried, in horror too great for words.

"Yes!" cried Rhoda, springing to her feet, and crying out: "I swear to you that this is Kenward Monk, the man I wedded, and who deserted me! This is the father of my little dead babe!"

The expression upon Miss Walsh's face was horrible to see.

She rose in awful wrath and struck her hands sharply together as she turned and faced the girl.

"It was fate that sent you across my path," she exclaimed, hoarsely. "But for this timely intervention my innocent niece would have wedded that villain on the morrow. But I thank Heaven that I am now able to prevent it, and to avenge you as well, my poor child. Ah!" she cried, as a sudden thought flashed through her mind, "an idea has come to me, by which I can not only wreak my vengeance upon him, but mete out justice to you as well."

"Oh, no, no; do not do anything to harm him!" cried Rhoda, in terror. "Cruel as he has been to me, I love him still, and I shall always love him!"

"What I intend to do will not harm him. I repeat that it will right your wrong," she added, grimly. "There shall be a wedding to-morrow, my poor, unfortunate girl. But listen to me well, and heed what I say—you shall be this man's bride to-morrow instead of my niece. Leave everything to me."

She gathered up her wrap and gloves and put them on.

"I shall have a great deal to do between now and nightfall. But this I say to you, Rhoda Cairn: Be ready to go with me when I shall come for you. It may be to-night, perhaps to-morrow night. Ask me no questions now, but trust in me implicitly. Since the hour I came across you in your misfortune, you have found me a good friend to you, Rhoda, have you not?"

"Yes," sobbed Rhoda, wretchedly, "I—I—would have perished in the street but for you, noble lady. I respect and have all confidence in you."

"Then by that confidence do as I bid you," repeated Miss Walsh. "I will send some clothing for you to wear. Wrap about you the long, dark cloak you wore in coming here, and be in readiness."

With these words, Miss Walsh fairly flew from the cottage.

Rhoda sank back in her chair, pale and excited.

"Why should the announcement that he is to be married to-morrow have shocked me?" she moaned. "I had every reason to expect that would occur any day after I read it myself in the paper."

She did not sob or cry out. It seemed to her that the very heart within her was crushed. She had borne so much that it appeared there was nothing more left for her to endure.

Like one in a dream she sat with clasped hands while the hours rolled by—those hours in which Miss Walsh was accomplishing so much.

The good woman in the little cottage where she had found shelter wondered greatly why the charitable lady left so suddenly, and why the young girl sat staring from the window with that deathly look upon her face.

Miss Walsh was thankful beyond words that she

had not brought her maid with her on her last visit.

In all possible haste she hurried to the magnificent home of her sister.

Although living in the same city, the married sister saw very little of Miss Walsh, the latter devoted so much of her time to charity. She had not been to the house but once since Mrs. Graves had written to her of her daughter Nina, and that she was soon to be married.

Nina was delighted when she looked out and saw her aunt drive up.

"What a surprise, dear aunt!" she cried, throwing her white arms about her. "Mamma and I were just speaking of you. I was almost afraid that you had forgotten the date set for the wedding. And just to think you have never met my intended, and he so anxious to see the darling aunt I have always been talking of! I want you to see him, he is so lovely. But what did you think of the picture?" rattled on Nina, in her gay, girlish fashion, without giving the other a chance to answer.

"You are very, very much in love with him!" asked Miss Walsh, anxiously.

"Why shouldn't I be?" cried the girl, blushing as red as a rose, and hiding her peachy face against her aunt's broad shoulder. "No girl ever had a more devoted lover."

"Yes, it is plainly to be seen that you do love him," said Miss Walsh, sternly.

There was something in the voice that made the girl look up into the hard face.

"Dear me! I ought to have known better than discuss my love affairs with Aunt Walsh," she thought. "She doesn't know anything about love or lovers. No man has ever been audacious enough to make love to auntie."

"You do not reply to my question," said Miss Walsh, gravely.

"You mean whether I love him very much or not, auntie!" asked Nina, blushing as red as a rose. "My marriage to him answers that question, does it not? I could not imagine a young girl marrying a man whom she did not love."

"Nor could one imagine a man marrying a girl whom he did not love," said Miss Walsh, looking strangely at Nina.

"No," replied Nina; "certainly not. I should certainly imagine that a young man must love a girl before he asked her to become his wife."

"Yes, that is it," said Miss Walsh, triumphantly. "A man who would marry a girl without loving her, must be a scoundrel, a villain of the deepest dye—a man to be held up to scorn by every paraded young girl!"

"Yes!" admitted Nina, wondering greatly at the train her aunt's thoughts had taken.

The idea of young men ever proving false to their sweethearts had never occurred to the mind of innocent Nina.

"We won't think of such a possibility," she said, sweetly.

"Yes, we will!" returned Miss Walsh emphatically. "I want to ask you this, Nina Graves," she added, holding the girl off at arm's length, and looking keenly into her face. "Would you love a man who has broken another girl's heart?"

"No," replied the girl, trembling in affright.

"That's all I want to know, then," replied Miss Walsh, dropping the girl's hand and stalking into the house. "Where's your mother?" she asked.

"Out shopping!" returned Nina.

"Well, I will go with you up to your boudoir," said Miss Walsh, "and I will hear more about this handsome lover of yours."

The girl hung her head bashfully. How could she talk to her of her lover! With great reluctance Nina followed her through the spacious hall to her own boudoir.

"I do not know what to tell you about him, auntie, except that he is the dearest fellow in all the world, and just adores me; at least, that is what he tells me," said Nina.

"Humph!" ejaculated Miss Walsh.

"I would rather you would see him for yourself, then you could form your own opinion. He

will be here this evening. I am sure you will like him."

"At what time do you expect him?" asked Miss Walsh, with unusual interest.

"Let me answer you in the words of the song," said Nina, laughing lightly.

"Somebody's coming when the dew-drops fall."

"Do not be silly, Nina," said her aunt, sharply. "I asked you what time this young man is to call here this evening."

"It is generally half-past seven when he arrives," said Miss Graves, smiling mischievously.

"Very well," said Miss Walsh. "When he calls, I will go down into the drawing-room and interview him."

"I'm sure he would be most delighted," returned the young girl, demurely.

"That's neither here nor there," returned Miss Walsh. "I do not care whether he likes me or not."

"I know you do not care very much about young men, auntie; but I hope you will like this one, for my sake," pleaded Nina, sweetly.

Was it only her fancy, or did she hear her aunt mutter something about traitors or deceivers?

"Promise me that you will try to be agreeable to him, auntie," coaxed Nina.

"I will be as pleasant to him as he deserves," declared Miss Walsh, with a fixed purpose shining in her eyes.

"Don't say much about what you like or dislike about young men, will you, auntie? It would be a little embarrassing before me, you know," said Nina, anxiously, a strange premonition of coming evil creeping over her.

CHAPTER XXVI

MISS WALSH had made her resolution. She would interview this man when he came. She would foil him, this fiend in human form, who would wed one young and lovely girl after bringing sorrow to another.

When Miss Walsh made up her mind to a course, nothing could change it.

"What I am about to do is for Nina's good," she told herself, grimly. "There will be a few tears at first, but the time will come when she will thank me with all her heart for saving her from such a consummate rascal. The women of our race have never forgiven men who have deceived other women. Nina should not be an exception to the rule. She is young now, but when she comes to know more about life she will thank me for saving her."

"Now," said her aunt, aloud, depositing herself in the nearest chair, and deliberately removing her hat and mantle, "tell me about this sweetheart of yours."

Nina came over to the hassock and flung herself down upon it and looked up with laughing eyes into her aunt's face.

"I sent you his picture," she said, "because you did not seem inclined to come here to meet him, auntie, so that you could see for yourself just how he looks. But it does not do him justice," went on Nina, clasping her hands. "That portrait does not tell you how good and noble he is, and how much he thinks of me!"

An expression that was almost divine came over the face of Nina Graves as she uttered the words in a low, sweet voice.

"Tell me about him," again urged her aunt, anxious to fathom just how deep was the love the girl bore him.

Should she confide in Nina the story of Rhoda Cairn, Miss Walsh knew that the present state of affairs must end.

There were girls who would turn in horror from a man who had done as cruel a deed as that which was laid at the door of the man whom Nina was about to marry. But might not Nina cling to him despite all?

"He is all that is noble," continued Nina, dreamily.

"What if he should cease to love you?" said her aunt.

Nina started; a quiver of pain passed over the lovely face.

"Cease to love me!" she repeated. "Ah! do you know what would happen to me, auntie, if that were to occur? I should die, that is all. When all was gone that made life worth living, how could I live?"

"It is not easy to die," said Miss Walsh, huskily.

"It would be easy for me," declared Nina. "One cannot live without a heart, and I have given mine to my love."

"Do you think it wise for a girl to become completely engrossed in her love?" said Miss Walsh, laying a trembling hand on the pretty nut-brown head.

"No, certainly not," replied the girl; "but there are some who cannot help it. I have my own ideas about love," she went on. "I believe that it is the beginning of one's life. After a girl has once loved, the only happiness for her is to wed the one to whom she has given her heart."

"Men are unlike women," said Miss Walsh. "Even the quality of their lives is different. You believe in constancy, Nina?" she asked, eagerly bending forward.

"Yes," returned the girl, mustily; "I believe in one love and no more."

Miss Walsh's eyes brightened. That settled all doubt in her mind. Her path was clearly defined for her now.

She continued to talk of her lover in a sweet, girlish fashion; but Miss Walsh scarcely heard a word she said, she was so engrossed in her own thoughts and plans.

The long hours rolled on. Miss Walsh had but a dim idea of the intensity of the girl's love as she knelt at her feet.

Long years ago, when Miss Walsh was as young and fair as Nina was now, she had had a romance. A young and handsome man, the son of an old general who was a great friend of the family, had fallen in love with her after knowing her only a fortnight.

While she was decided upon the answer she would give him, there came to her ears the story of an entanglement—something very like the story of Rhoda Cairn. When the young man came to her for her answer, she met him with such scorn and anger that he looked at her in wonder.

She sent him from her with bitter words on her lips.

On the threshold he paused.

"I am glad of your decision," he said, with polite irony. "I see now that we would have been cruelly mislabeled had I married you. Young girls who display a temper like yours usually grow into perfect viragoes. I wish you good morning and good-bye, Miss Walsh!"

Whether that love affair had left an impression upon her or not, her friends never knew; but certain it was he was the only lover who ever came to woo her. But life apparently went on with Miss Walsh just the same. Her heart had not been fully awakened, and she devoted herself to charity. But those who knew her soon found out she had a hobby, and that was, doing everything in her power to right the wrongs of girls who had been deceived by false lovers. It had grown to be a mania with her. The only being that she was ever known to evince much love for was little Nina Graves, her niece.

If she had had her way, Nina would never have been allowed to look upon the face of man. She tried to tell her that young girls were better off without lovers. But Nina was young, and it was only natural that she should think otherwise. And when this handsome lover came to woo her, it was not very hard for her to learn to care for him.

True, she was startled at first by her lover's resemblance to the rascally fellow who only a few months before had set all the tongues in Brighton wagging. But Owen Courtney could not help that. Living near her was a young girl who so closely resembled Nina that they were often taken for each other. So she did not think anything of the resemblance. Indeed, she did not even tell him of it, lest it should hurt his feelings. Of course she was not likely to mention the Brighton incident to him.

Nina had seen Kenward Monk at Brighton for

such a short time that his face had faded from her mind. As she grew accustomed to her lover, handsome, courteous Owen Courtney, she wondered how it was that they resembled each other.

Never having been brought in contact with that escape-grace cousin, her father and mother did not even know of that resemblance, and Nina would never mention it now.

She had never liked to talk to her aunt about her lover; for no matter what his virtues might be, she felt quite certain that Miss Walsh would dislike him. Still, she intended to do all in her power to impress her in favour of him. She expected her aunt would sneer at him; but when she did not, the girl took heart of grace, and talked to her more freely about him.

"You would be so glad if you knew just how perfectly happy I am, auntie," she went on, in a half-dreamy fashion. "Why it doesn't seem the same world to me. He came into my life as the sun breaks upon the flowers, suddenly, swiftly, and all at once my life became complete. I met him on board the steamer. I shall never forget how it came about. I had just come upon deck, and was about to walk to the railing, when the ship suddenly gave a lurch and I fell forward. I should have fallen to the deck had not a young man who was standing near by sprung quickly forward and caught me. That was the beginning of our acquaintance. My mother, who had followed me on deck, thanked him warmly. Love came to me swiftly. At the first glance, when our eyes met I knew that I had met the only one in the world that I could ever love. I loved him then with all my heart."

"Such a sudden love could not be a happy one; it could not end happily."

The girl smiled.

"In most instances that is the case," replied Nina. "But in mine—mine—ah, Heaven is to be thanked—mine is to be a happy love, and will have a happy ending!"

Ah, if she had but known, if she had but guessed the thoughts that filled Miss Walsh's heart, she might have died then and there.

The sun set, and the dusk crept into the room; but it was a subject that Nina loved, and she could have talked on forever about her lover.

"Mamma is very late in returning," she said, at length. "She may not even come home to dinner."

This proved to be the case. Nina and her aunt dined alone. She could not help but notice how her niece watched the clock with the brightest of eyes, the colour deepening on her cheeks.

"I shall want to talk with this lover of yours alone," said Miss Walsh, a trifle hoarsely.

"Will you want to talk to him long, auntie?" asked her niece wistfully.

"Yes; an hour, or perhaps two. I ordered my carriage at seven; it will be here as soon as he arrives. He will drive home with me, and can talk with me in the carriage."

Nina was a little surprised at this announcement, but it did not occur to her to offer any objection.

"Ah, here he comes now!" cried Nina, blushing furiously, all in a flutter of delight.

In a moment it seemed to her that her aunt had donned her hat and mantle. She was at the door as soon as the servant, dragging Nina by the arm.

Owen Courtney was surprised to see Nina coming to the door to meet him. Then his eyes fell upon the tall, austere woman in the rear.

He felt intuitively that this must be the aunt of whom Nina was always speaking. Even before he heard the hurried words of introduction, the young man held out his hand with a cordial smile.

"I am most pleased to meet you, Miss Walsh," he said. "I have heard Nina speak of you so much that I feel as if I really knew and loved you already."

Was it only his fancy, or was the greeting of Nina's aunt a trifle chilly?

"You are to accompany my aunt to her home," said his fiancée, adding, with a little twinkle in her eye: "Auntie has something to say to you."

For a moment he looked crestfallen; then he added, gallantly:

"I shall be most pleased. Pray command me, Miss Walsh."

Another moment, and they were seated in the carriage. He began to talk brightly to his companion; but to his great surprise, she answered him only in monosyllables.

"I am very much afraid she does not like me," he thought, with some consternation, and he redoubled his efforts to be agreeable. Anyone who was related in any way to his darling Nina was dear to him. He was always liked by women; he hoped from the depths of his heart that this lady would not form an aversion to him. But somehow he felt a cold, uncomfortable chill creeping over his heart. Was it a premonition of the evil that was so soon to come?

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALTHOUGH Owen Courtney tried his best to entertain Nina's aunt as they rode along, it seemed to him almost an impossible undertaking. She stared at him so intently that he wondered what she was thinking of. He thought it might be as to whether he would make Nina a good husband, and he wished with all his heart to set her doubts at rest on this point, so he began to talk of Nina, and tell her how much he thought of her.

The more he spoke of her niece, the sterner Miss Walsh's face seemed to grow.

He was wondering to himself how long she would detain him, he longed so for to return to Nina, who he knew was waiting for him with the utmost impatience.

Suddenly Miss Walsh turned to him.

"You say you would do anything for Nina's good—for her future happiness!" she asked, slowly.

"Yes—certainly," he answered. "I would lay down my life for her. No sacrifice would be too great for me to make."

"You are sure of that?" she asked, quickly.

"There is no question of it," Nina's lover answered, promptly. "To save her from a moment's pain, I would lay down twenty lives if I had them."

"Very well; I will soon put you to the test," thought Miss Walsh.

Suddenly the carriage came to a stop. To the young man's great surprise, he found, as he assisted Miss Walsh to alight that they were in front of a small and unpretentious church.

"Step this way," she said, leading him round to the door of the parsonage.

He had heard that Miss Walsh was very religious; but her action now rather puzzled him. Still, without a thought of what the outcome might be, he followed where she led.

She spoke hurriedly to the coachman, and with a bow, he drove quickly away.

"The vicar has been called suddenly away to a sick person," said the girl who admitted them to the vicarage. "He begged me to say that he would return within the hour."

The young man wondered what business she had with the parson; but he made no comment, but followed her into the parsonage. The reception-room into which they were shown, was dimly lighted. Miss Walsh seemed to be well acquainted there.

Mr. Courtney took the seat Miss Walsh indicated.

"I have something to say to you," she began, in a hard, set voice. "I shall break right into the subject at once. Your wedding with my niece is fixed for to-morrow is it not?"

"Yes," he said, wonderingly.

"Why should not your marriage take place to-night—here and now?" she asked, looking intently at him.

For an instant he almost believed that the good lady had taken leave of her senses. He stared at her in the most complete bewilderment.

In a slow and emphatic voice she repeated her words.

"My dear madam," he said. "I do not see how that could possibly be. You know it is not to be a quiet affair. Over five hundred invitations have been issued."

"You will be married to-night, and let to-

morrow take care of itself," said Miss Walsh, sternly.

Had Nina sent her aunt to make this arrangement? He could hardly believe his own senses. But surely it must be so.

He remembered the twinkle in her eyes as she had said—

"You are to ride with auntie; she has something to say to you."

"I am so dumfounded, I do not know how to answer you," he declared.

"You will not refuse me?" she asked.

"Refuse you! How could I refuse a request in which my happiness is so much bound up!" he answered eagerly.

"It is well!" said Miss Walsh. "Your bride is on the way here by this time."

"Is this idea one of your planning?" asked Nina's lover, curiously.

"Yes," she answered, very quickly.

It seemed a very strange proceeding to him, but then he did not pretend to understand the ways of women. He was only too anxious to carry out Nina's slightest wish. He was so deeply in love with her that he did not question the strangeness of her aunt's action.

Before he had time to think over the matter,

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two carriages drove up to the door from different directions. Out of one stepped the vicar, and from the other a slender figure, robed in snowy white, and almost enveloped in a white tulle veil.

He would have sprung to meet her, but Miss Walsh held him back.

"Not yet," she said. "She will meet us at the altar; the vicar will bring her in."

Miss Walsh seemed to be running this novel affair, and he did not suppose that it would be worth while to try to dissuade her, since she must have talked it over with Nina.

He followed her into the dimly-lighted church, and down the long aisle to the altar-rail. Only one light was lighted, which left all the corners of the great edifice in darkness and gloom.

He had naturally a great deal of nerve; but to save his life he could not help a feeling of awe coming over him.

Before he had time to say anything, he saw the clergyman in his clerical robes coming from an opposite direction with the bride-elect on his arm. His heart throbbed, every pulse quickened; a moment more, and they had advanced.

"My darling!" he cried, as he sprang forward and clasped the trembling girl in his arms.

She tried to speak, but the words died away in her throat. It seemed to Owen that he was in a dream. Even the girl who stood by his side seemed scarcely real. The folds of the filmy veil almost concealed her.

"Are you ready?" asked the clergyman, opening the book.

"Yes," answered Owen, promptly.

"Yes," said Miss Walsh, speaking for the bride-elect.

The marriage ceremony was begun. Then came the question solemnly, warningly, from the clergyman's lips; "If anyone knows aught why this man or woman should not be united in holy wedlock, let him now speak, or forever hold his peace!"

There was an ominous silence. Miss Walsh trembled. She was doing a noble action in righting a terrible wrong, she told herself, and there was no response to the clergyman's appeal.

In a voice which seemed still more solemn, he pronounced the two before him man and wife.

The bridegroom caught the bride in his arms, and he laughed gaily to see how she trembled in his embrace.

"My wife!" he cried, straining her to his heart. "Sweet," he murmured in a voice just audible to his bride, "to be the lover of the girl you love is bliss; but to be the husband of the girl you love is heaven! Tell me, Nina, are you not as happy as I am?"

A low cry broke from the white lips of the girl he held in his arms. The clergyman had stepped into the parsonage in response to a summons from one of the servants, and invited the newly-wedded couple and Miss Walsh to follow him.

He was not surprised that they held back a moment. It seemed to be the custom with all new-married couples to loiter for a moment in the dim shadows of the old church.

The critical moment of Miss Walsh's triumph had come. She had done a noble action, she told herself. But somehow she trembled at the thought of what Owen Courtney would do when he discovered that the girl whom he had wedded was not the beautiful Nina but the cruelly-wronged Rhoda Cairn.

The young husband had drawn his bride beneath the gaslight, and, all unmindful of Miss Walsh's presence, he declared, rapturously,—

"I must have a kiss from the lips of my wife!"

As he spoke he drew aside her veil. One glance at the face it had hidden—oh, so piteous to behold in its awful pallor! And a cry, surely the most bitter that ever broke from human lips, issued from Owen Courtney's. His arms fell from the supple figure, and he drew back, crying hoarsely,—

"You are not Nina! Great Heaven! what does this mean! Who are you?"

Miss Walsh stepped forward.

"I wonder that you ask such a question!" she

cried, shrilly. "Look upon her, and behold for yourself the young girl whom you duped and deserted! Now, thank Heaven, she is your wedded wife!" she added, triumphantly. "I have helped her to right her wrongs!"

"But I never saw this young woman before!" cried Owen, striking his forehead with his clenched hand. "There is some terrible mistake. Speak out!" he cried to the girl at his side, who was trembling like an aspen-leaf. "Who are you who have done this terrible deed?"

Like one dying, the hapless bride fell on her knees at Miss Walsh's feet.

"There is some terrible mistake!" she cried, wildly. "I—I did not discover it until he drew back my veil. He—is—not—the man!"

"Not the man!" repeated Miss Walsh, aghast, hardly believing that she had heard aright, her eyes almost starting from their sockets. "I—I do not understand!" she cried, recoiling from the girl. "Do you mean that the man you have just wedded, and the one whom you told me was the cause of wrecking your life, is not one and the same?"

The girl shook her head, while Owen Courtney looked from one to the other like one in a dream from which he was expecting to soon awake.

Miss Walsh caught her by the shoulder.

"What does it mean?" she cried, hoarsely.

"You assured me that this man was the cause of all your trouble, and now you dare to tell me that he is not the one! And I—I brought about this, making you his wife! It was a trick of yours, you shameless creature, to secure a husband for yourself. Quick! Be gone from this sacred edifice ere I strike you down at my feet, you most shameless outcast, you horrible creature!"

Rhoda drew back in terror from the upraised hand.

"Hold!" cried Owen Courtney, stepping between them. "No matter what this poor creature has done, she is, in the eyes of Heaven and man, my wife!"

By a dexterous movement he had raised the poor girl from her knees, and had swung her out of the reach of the blow that had been meant for her. Despite his anguish, it aroused all the pity and chivalry in his nature to see how the poor thing clung to him in her terror.

"Save me from her wrath," she murmured, clinging to him with death-cold hands, and adding vehemently: "Believe me, it was all a horrible mistake! I saw your picture, and—and I mistook you for another. The church was so dimly lighted, I—I could not see, and I did not know the terrible mistake until—until it was too late! Oh, tell me, tell me, what can I do to undo the great wrong that I have done you!"

(To be continued.)

ROWNTREE'S ELECT COCOA.—Doctors are everywhere recommending cocoa as a stimulating and strengthening beverage. A good cocoa, pure, strong, and free from fatty matter, such as Rowntree's Elect, not only strengthens the body, but refreshes and stimulates tired brains and nerves. Persons who, from work or other causes, are obliged to keep late hours, will find a cup of this cocoa invaluable. It may be taken by invalids and those who suffer from indigestion, whilst for young children it is all that can be desired. A free trial test tin will be sent to any reader of this Journal if they write for it to Messrs. A. Rowntree and Co., Ltd., Great Tower Street, London, E.C.

The shawl of shawls belongs to the Duchess of Northumberland. It formerly belonged to Charles X. of France, and was manufactured entirely from the fur of Persian cats. Many thousands of cat skins were utilized, and the weaving occupied some years. The shawl measures eight yards square, but is so fine that it can be compressed into the space of a large coffee-cup.

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfluous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps, from Dr. Bonn, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth.

EPPS'S

EXTRACT FROM A LECTURE ON "FOODS AND THEIR VALUES," BY DR. ANDREW WILSON, F.R.S.E., &c.—
"If any motive—first, of due regard for health, and second, of getting full food-value for money expended—can be said to weigh with us in choosing our foods, then I say that Cocoa (Epps's being the most nutritious) should be made to replace tea and coffee without hesitation. Cocoa is a food; tea and coffee are not foods. This is the whole science of the matter in a nutshell, and he who runs may read the obvious moral of the story."

COCOA

LADIES' APIOL AND STEEL PILLS.

A FRENCH REMEDY FOR ALL IRREGULARITIES. Superseding Pennyroyal, Bitter Apple, and Pill Cockle.

Obtainable only from MARTIN, Pharmaceutical Chemist, Southampton.

DOES YOUR HEAD ACHE?

"KAPUTINE" cures instantly.

Enclose stamped addressed envelope to "K." KAPUTINE, LTD., HUNDENFELD, for free sample, with name of nearest agent.

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Prevents Decay, Saves Extractions, Relieves Nerve Pain.
Neutralises Headaches and all Nerve Pains removed by BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 6d.

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See Ill. Guide (300 pages), 3d. How to open a Cigar Store, 25s. to 250s. TOBACCONISTS' OUTFITTING CO., 156, Boston Road, London. The largest and original house (50 years' reputation). Manager, H. MYERS.

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The application of this to the face removes wrinkles and the crow's feet marks, giving a youthful appearance. 3s. 6d., sent secretly packed for 50 stamps.—62, Theobald's Road, London, W.C. Bar Machine, for outstanding cars, 10s. 6d.; post, 11s.

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This is a contrivance by which the short cartilage of the nose is pressed into shape by wearing the instrument an hour daily for a short time. Price 10s. 6d., sent free for stamps.—ALEX. ROSS, 62, Theobald's Road, London, opposite Bedford Row. Established 1850. Parcel free from observation.

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in the World for Lashes, Eyebrows, and Hair on the Head, with Moustache and Beard. For Ladies' Hair and for all Colours. Had at 3s. 6d., post 3s. 9d., of ALEX. ROSS, 62, Theobald's Road, High Holborn, London, W.C.

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Quickly and certainly remove all obstructions, arising from any cause whatever, where Steel and Pennyroyal fails. Invaluable to women. Post-free, under cover, for 14 and 35 stamps from THOMAS OTTEY, Chemist, Burton-on-Trent. Please mention LONDON READER.

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CURED. A lady having cured her husband severely of intemperance habits will gladly send particulars of the remedy to anyone forwarding stamped envelope.—Write privately Mrs. L. R. HARRINGTON, 4, Featherstone Buildings, London, W.C. Posters are enclosed.

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INVALUABLE FOR LADIES.

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FACETIE.

"YOUR son is an actor, you say, Mr. Maginnis?" "Faith he is." "And what rôle does he play?" "Rolls, is it? Faith, he rolls up the curtain."

"He?" "How is one to tell that a love is only platonic?" She: "Oh, well, when it develops into the other kind you can look back and see the difference."

"BROTHER," said the minister, "you should try to be content with what you have." "I am," said the brother, who had been grumbling. "It is what I ain't got that I am dissatisfied about."

MR. HOGAN: "Can't prove Mickey a aboun-drill! An' the devil, isn't it myself that's repeatedly met him in places where no decent man would be seen!"

GUEST (in cheap restaurant): "Here, waiter! this meat is simply vile. I won't pay for it. Where's the proprietor?" Waiter: "He's out at lunch, sir."

PARKER: "How do you like your rooms in your new flat?" Pleshleigh: "Oh, they're a good fit. A little tight across the shoulders, perhaps."

HE: "Did you tell your father that I would kill myself if I couldn't have you?" She: "Yes." He: "What did he say?" She: "He said that settled it. You couldn't have me."

MISSIONARY (just landed): "Did a missionary by the name of Brown ever visit the interior?" Cannibal King: "If you will wait a moment I will look over some of my recent bills of fare."

INDIGNANT BICYCLIST: "Madam, your dog snaps at me every time I pass. Here he comes now." [Starts off.] Old Lady: "Sport, Sport! you foolish dog! Come here, Them ain't bones. Them's legs."

CUSTOMER: "You know that prescription you filled for me yesterday—I want a copy of it." Druggist: "I'm afraid you'll have to get it from the doctor. I never could read his handwriting."

CLARISSA: "Oh, Lucia, I've been looking at your lovely wedding presents. There are seventeen full dinner-sets among them!" Lucia: "I shall need them all, as I expect to start with a general servant."

YOUNG DOCTOR: "I have been visiting him for a year, but he does not improve. Something must be seriously wrong with his system." Old Doctor: "Isn't it just possible that there is something wrong with your system?"

FIRST DETECTIVE: "There really isn't any evidence against him." Second Detective: "Why did you arrest him?" First Detective: "Well—er—there isn't any evidence against anybody else."

PRETTY WIFE (poutingly): "That Mrs. Plaine has a dozen dresses handsomer than the only good one I've got." Smart Husband: "A homely woman like that needs rich attire to attract attention from her face. You don't." [Pretty wife subsides.]

HUSBAND: "It seems to me that you come to my office a good deal more than there is any necessity for." Wife: "I cannot help it, dear; your manners in the office are so much nicer than they are at home that I like to enjoy the contrast."

MRS. ESPECK (reading): "Another mysterious suicide—unknown man throws himself from a cliff." Mr. Especk (thoughtlessly): "Bet his wife was at the bottom of it." Mrs. Especk: "Sir-r-r!" Mr. Especk (hurriedly): "Of the cliff, my love; not the suicide."

"How are you?" cried the chrysanthemum to the palm at the other end of the ballroom, after the dance. "Pretty low-spirited. I heard to-night at least seventy-five declarations of everlasting love." "Seventy-five! Why, how many men were here to-night?" "About twenty-five," answered the palm, sadly. And the experienced chrysanthemum understood, and whispered something to her leaves.

"BRIDGET, how did it happen that when we came in last night after the theatre, there was a policeman in the kitchen?" "Sure, mum, I don't know; but I think the theatre didn't last as long as usual."

"WOULD you be willing to live in a haunted house?" inquired Mrs. Meekton, who had been considering the advisability of moving. "Well, Henrietta," was the answer "I must say it would be a good deal of a comfort to be able to hear noises without having to get up and hunt burglars."

SHE (arrayed for the theatre): "Sorry to have kept you waiting so long, Mr. Spoonmore, but it has taken me longer than usual to get ready. I look a fright in this hat, too." He (vaguely desirous of saying something complimentary): "It isn't the—er—fault of the lovely hat, I am sure, Miss Hankinson."

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Medical Certificate sent with each Bottle.

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Address—M. LEIGH & CRAWFORD, 31, Brooke St., Holborn, London, E.C.

SOCIETY.

THE Duke of York has been unanimously asked to accept the position of High Steward of Reading, which became vacant a few months ago by the death of Mr. Richard Benyon, of Englefield House.

THE Queen has presented a piece of land to the parish of Whippingham for the enlargement of the churchyard, and her Majesty has generously paid all the expenses in connection with laying out the ground and building a substantial wall round it.

THE Princess of Wales will return to London for the season during the last week in April, accompanied by Princess Victoria and Princess Charles of Denmark, who is to spend the season at Marlborough House, owing to the impending departure of her husband for a cruise to Siam.

THE Duke of Coburg and his son are to stay in Egypt until the beginning of April, when they will be conveyed in the Admiralty yacht *Surprise* from Alexandria to Villefranche, and they intend to spend a short time on the Riviera before returning to Germany. The Duke and Duchess of Coburg will not come to London this year until after Whitsuntide.

QUEEN MARGHERITA of Italy intends to be seen a good deal this season wearing coral jewellery, in order to encourage an industry which of late years has somewhat fallen upon evil days. It would not be surprising if the fashion were to spread to London, as coral is becoming to almost any complexion, and can, of course, be had in any shade, from a rose-pink so delicate as to be almost imperceptible, up to a vivid red.

THE Queen's journey to Clonmel will be extended; occupying three nights instead of two, as it is so desirable that the Queen should suffer no fatigue. The first night will be passed in Portsmouth Harbour, on board the royal yacht *Victoria and Albert*, the second night on the same vessel in Cherbourg Harbour, and the third in the Royal train, which will go at reduced speed; the Queen has a great objection to very fast railway travelling. According to these arrangements her Majesty would reach Nice late in the afternoon of Friday, March 11th.

THE illness of the Empress Eugénie prevented her from paying her usual visit to the Queen this autumn, and it has therefore been arranged that her Majesty and Princess Beatrice shall visit her at Cap St. Martin, when they go to Clonmel next month. The acute rheumatism from which the ex-Empress has been suffering has not only greatly prostrated her, but has practically crippled her, and the Queen is sorely distressed at the thought that she may consequently see even less of her old friend than she has during the last few years, as the Empress will probably find it more and more difficult to travel about.

RUSSIAN SOCIETY has caught hold of a new craze which will doubtless, in due time, spread over Europe. It started with the gift of a mechanical talking doll to the Grand Duchess Olga by the President of the French Republic. No less a personage than the Czar was fascinated by the ingenious toy, and he at once began ransacking Paris and St. Petersburg for all the mechanical toys he could find. And now the Russian Court spends most of its time in playing with model motor cars, wooden monkeys on sticks, pneumatic frogs and other contrivances of the kind. Readers of Waliszewski's "Life of Peter the Great" will remember that the amusements of the Russian Court were of a much less innocent character in former times.

THE jubilee of the Emperor Francis Joseph will be celebrated in London with appropriate rejoicings by his loyal subjects, who appear generally to hold their Sovereign in affectionate esteem; and the Austro-Hungarian people, as a rule, preserve the traditions of their nationality more jealously while sojourning away from their own land than do their cousins from Germany.

STATISTICS.

MORE than 1,250,000 acres of land are devoted to the cultivation of tobacco.

THE fastest-flowing river in the world is the Sutlej, in India. Its descent is 12,000 feet in 180 miles.

THE largest room in the world under one roof and unbroken by pillars is at St. Petersburg. It is 620 ft. long by 120 ft. in breadth.

WHERE the telephone wires are overlaid, the speed of transmission is at the rate of 16,000 miles a second; where the wires are through cables under the sea the speed is not more than 6,020 miles a second.

GEMS.

WE are never made so ridiculous by the qualities we have, as by those we affect to have.

MORAL beauty cannot co-exist with radical defects of principle. The character that is unable to resist temptation, or unwilling to stick faithfully to duty, is no more truly beautiful, whatever be its generous impulses or amiable traits, than a figure which cannot support its own weight. Parts of it may be admirable; but, as a whole, as a unity, it cannot be rightly called a beautiful character, for it lacks the foundation.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BATTER FOR FRITTERS.—One cup of flour, half a teaspoonful of baking powder, pinch of salt, two eggs, one cup of milk. Sift flour, salt, and powder together, add eggs beaten, and milk. Mix thoroughly.

HARD GINGERBREAD.—One cup of butter, one cup and one-third cups of treacle, two-thirds of a cup of sugar, three eggs, one teaspoonful of cream of tartar, two teaspoonfuls of soda, and one teaspoonful of ginger.

BAKED OMELETTE.—Four or six eggs; beat whites separately. Small tea-cup of milk, butter size of walnut. One tablespoonful of flour, a little salt. Beat yolk, add butter, milk, flour, and salt; lastly the beaten whites. Butter a dish just the size to hold it; bake in quick oven.

PEANUT CANDY.—Boil together two cups of treacle, one cup brown sugar, one tablespoonful of butter, one tablespoonful of vinegar. Having cracked and rubbed the skin from the peanuts, put them into buttered pans and when the candy is done pour over the nuts. Cut into squares while warm.

SOFT GINGERBREAD.—Two cups of flour, one cup of treacle, one cup of boiling water, two tablespoonfuls of melted butter, a pinch of salt, two tablespoonfuls of ginger, one teaspoonful of cinnamon, one teaspoonful of soda in boiling water. Beat together three minutes. To be eaten hot.

BEEFSTEAK SMOTHERED IN ONIONS.—To one pound of steak use six onions. Slice, and put into a hot spider, with one tablespoonful of butter and lard. Stir constantly, to prevent scorching, and fry a deep brown colour, and turn into a hot covered dish. Then, in the same spider, fry the steak quickly. Serve on a hot platter, season with salt, pepper and butter and pour the onions over all.

OATMEAL BROWN BREAD.—One cup of rolled oat, made into a porridge, stir in one cupful of molasses, one and a half cupfuls of lukewarm water, in which is dissolved one yeast cake and one teaspoonful of salt; knead into this mixture enough flour to make a stiff dough; set over night in a warm place; put in pans the next morning; when light bake in a rather slow oven about one hour and twenty minutes, or until it is thoroughly cooked.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Turks believe amber an infallible guard against the injurious effects of nicotine; hence its extensive use for the mouthpieces of pipes.

It is said that in some of the farming districts of China pigs are harnessed to small waggons and made to draw them.

THE Chinese dictionary, compiled by Pa-ent-sha, 1,100 years B.C., is the most ancient of any recorded in literary history.

THE New Guinea baby has a novel method of being carried about. Its mother puts the little creature into a net, which is suspended by a band over her head and her ears in front of her.

NEXT to our grape wine it is believed that Japanese saké, or rice wine, is the oldest alcoholic beverage known to man. Its use in Japan dating back over two thousand years.

FRENCH Guiana is said to have the most violent thunderstorms in the world. The thunder is almost deafening, and the peals come in quick succession.

BRICKS made of plaster-of-Paris and cork are now used in the construction of powder-mills. In case of explosion they offer slight resistance, and are broken to atoms.

THE bridal veil of a Japanese young lady is subsequently used as her shroud. Just after the marriage it is carefully put away, and reserved until her death makes its use necessary.

THERE are in Paris 70,000 persons who make articles of women's dress, and 65,000 dressmakers. It has been estimated that the yearly amount earned in this business there is over £50,000,000.

A CORK rope is the latest invention. It is made of small corks placed end to end, and the whole covered with a braiding of cotton twine; over this is a coarse braiding in heavy strands. The rope will stand a strain of one thousand pounds.

It is found that bacteria are readily taken up by ice in freezing. Chicago has passed a rigid ordinance forbidding the cutting of ice within three miles of any town or city of over 20,000 inhabitants.

THE giraffe is gradually disappearing in some parts of Africa. Where it was no uncommon thing to see herds of eighty some years ago, it is now a rarity to see a herd of more than twenty strong.

OF all the cities New York has the largest number of Irish, 190,418; of Germans, 210,723; of Russians, 48,799; and of Italians, 39,951. The children born of foreign parents in this country are not included.

AT the beginning of the present century the Bible could be studied by only one-fifth of the earth's population. Now it is translated into languages which make it accessible to nine-tenths of the world's inhabitants.

A PAPER bicycle has now invaded the field. Paper fibre, similar to that sometimes used in the manufacture of railway carriage wheels, is employed for tubing, and is as strong as any in use. A factory is said to be contemplated for the production of bicycles of this sort.

THE omnibuses of one London company cover just upon twenty million miles in the course of a year—half as much as is covered by the trains of the London and North-Western Railway—a distance sufficient to take them nearly three times round the world every day.

AN Inspector, taking children over countries of Europe, asked what would be the best specimen of those various countries to bring home. A sharp boy, who omitted giving tallow from Russia, when asked why, stated that it was nasty, greasy stuff, and his mother wouldn't like him to spoil his clothes.

EDINBURGH, with its numerous schools of medicine and surgery, appears to possess more doctors than any other town in the United Kingdom in proportion to population, the rate in the Scottish capital being one to every 500 inhabitants. Glasgow, on the other hand, has about the same relative number as London—one in 850.

LIFEBUOY

Royal Disinfectant

SOAP

A DOCTOR'S OPINION.

Twyford, Berks,

March 2nd, 1896.

Dear Sirs,

We cannot overrate the value of cleanliness of person, that is of clothes and body. The bath, whether it be the daily cold tub, the evening warm bath, or the weekly Turkish, does far more than most people would believe. To avert sickness and maintain the body in health, such a soap as Lifebuoy Soap is beyond all praise. Its softness and purity most commend it to all.

Dr. GORDON STAPLES, R.N.

A NURSE'S OPINION.

5 Patahall Road,

Kentish Town, N.W.

Dear Sirs,

I think it right that you should know I used your Lifebuoy Royal Disinfectant Soap for patients' clothing and rooms, extensively throughout the late epidemic. I never travel without it, and have found it invaluable. The more I use it the better pleased I am.

L. POLLARD.

Late Nurse of the R.N.S. and other Hospitals.



FOR SAVING LIFE * FOR PRESERVATION OF HEALTH.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BREV.—Only salt and pepper.

ROB.—Apparently she is not entitled.

A. G.—You should consult a musician.

DOUBTFUL.—It would not be a breach of etiquette.

CONSTANT READER.—That depends upon the society's rules.

MICAH.—It would occupy far more space than we could afford.

INQUIRE.—By making inquiry or by advertising for information.

LAURE.—The "freedom of the city" is now purely an honorary distinction.

A. B.—A blind man or woman may keep a dog without obtaining a license.

K. L.—She has no right to detain your property. Apply to a magistrate.

ANXIOUS.—It is extremely difficult to obtain; we cannot suggest any sure way.

QUERENT.—Neither addresses nor recommendations are ever given in this column.

ROB ROY.—The first piece of underground railway laid in London was between Paddington and Farringdon-street.

JONATHAN.—Before the Reformation fifty per cent. of the land in the United Kingdom belonged to the Church.

B. L.—It is not permitted to privates of Highland regiments to wear pants under their kilts, either on or off parade.

BELLA.—Oatmeal should be cooked slowly and not be stirred, if its best flavour is to be preserved and it is not to be pasty.

IN DUTY.—A landlord can distrain upon the goods of a tenant as long as any arrears of rent remain unpaid or unsatisfied.

CURIOUS.—The national flower of England is the rose; of France, the lily; of Scotland, the thistle; of Ireland, the shamrock.

MATE.—If the boy is under thirteen he must remain at school until he has passed the standard fixed by the School Board of the district.

AMBITION.—A novel should be written upon one side only of nice, clean paper, that is cut to a size, and each page should be numbered. It should be typewritten, or it may be script if the penmanship is good and clear.

ARFOLD.—Any engagements for the Cape Mounted Rifles made in this country are through the Crown agents for the Colonies, Downing-street, London; write to that address.

ADA.—You might sponge the places with ammonia and water and afterwards with weak vinegar and water; try a small bit first; bunsins might do if that fails.

A. T.—You had better take it to one of the water-proofing or radiator shops, or you might try by placing it over with rubber solution, which can be got at any of the above-named shops.

THEN AND NOW.

The robin in her bowered nest
Among the swaying apple boughs
Loved and cherished her brood as men
O'erish old memories, now again
With the youth of things that cannot die.
The robin had happy eyes that day,
While you, O Love, were far away!

The children of the bowered nest
Among the fragrant apple boughs,
Have wandered far from home since then,
Nor ever wish to return again;
Life has its visions by far too fair.
The robin has grief-dimmed eyes to-day,
And you, O Love, are still away!

NINA.—Mix together the whites of two eggs, one teaspoonful spirits of wine, one ounce sugar, as much pulverised ivory black as may be required to produce the necessary shade of black; apply with a sponge, and polish with a piece of soft silk.

WOMAN.—If you got the top of the wart shaved off, and touched it every day thereafter with acetic acid, it would soon disappear; or you may touch it daily with lunar caustic without previous shaving, but rub off ointment each day.

GRACE.—Mix up the mushrooms, season them to taste with salt, a little cayenne and onion, stew in butter, have nicely fried bread cut in squares and made just before serving the mushrooms very hot upon it.

R. R.—At night a cushion may be put between the knees and the limbs tied together at the ankles; something may be also held between the knees during the day; such methods produce a certain degree of cure, but never a complete remedy; cycling would only aggravate the thing.

S. N.—It is not slanderous to call a man a liar; he might be that, and yet honest and honourable enough in his general conduct; the man who is an habitual liar offends against conscience, not against the statutes; to say he lies implies no criminality, though a lack of sense of responsibility, which is, to say the least of it, unsatisfactory.

INTERESTED TOM.—The reason why ships are not struck by lightning is attributed to the general use which is now made of wire rope for rigging purposes, as well as to the fact that the hulls of ships are usually constructed of iron or steel. Thus the whole ship forms an excellent and continuous conductor, by means of which the electricity is led into the ocean and dissipated.

G. V.—It is said that the giant tortoise of the Seychelles Islands is the largest-lived animal in the world. The known age of one now living is one hundred and fifty years, and this dates from the time the creature was full-grown. How old it was at the time of its capture no one is able to conjecture. A fine specimen has been presented to the Zoological Society. It weighs about a quarter of a ton and is an exceedingly lively animal.

R. B.—Nothing can be done save to put the product away until wanted, then soak a tablespoonful of best gelatine in water, let it come to a boil, add one glass of jelly, and after allowing it to boil up again pour it into a mould. Only the quantity required for immediate use should be prepared, as it loses its flavour by long standing. This will make a jelly which is a most excellent substitute for the all-fruit article. Indeed many persons cannot tell the difference.

THE LONDON READER can be sent to any part of the world, post-free, Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence. The yearly subscription for the Monthly Part, including Christmas Part, is Eight Shillings and Eightpence, post-free.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of any Booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 442 is Now Ready, price Sixpence, post free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LXIX., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX to VOL. LXIX. is Now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

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